

*Yasmina
El Abd
breaks
through*





RED, ONLY RED,
NOTHING BUT RED



HERMÈS
PARIS

Checking In

Check-in for travel news
and destinations in
our fortnightly newsletter

Sign up now



CONTENTS



20

08 SHOW OF METAL

The latest Clash de Cartier collection brings a renewed sense of playfulness

10 ALL IN THE FAMILY

With some of the world's most famous actresses as its ambassadors, Italian jeweller Damiani still counts family as its greatest strength

12 PERFORMANCE PIECES

Once dismissed as theatrical and frivolous, costume jewellery is being reappraised as a decorative art designed to be worn rather than locked away

16 A STUDY IN STILLNESS

Amira Al Zuhair takes centre stage in Loro Piana's Ramadan collection, which features timeless designs and contemporary ease

20 SEASON OF INTENTION

Ramadan is an important part of the annual fashion calendar, with local and global brands reflecting on the meaning of the month

24 THE MODERN MAJLIS

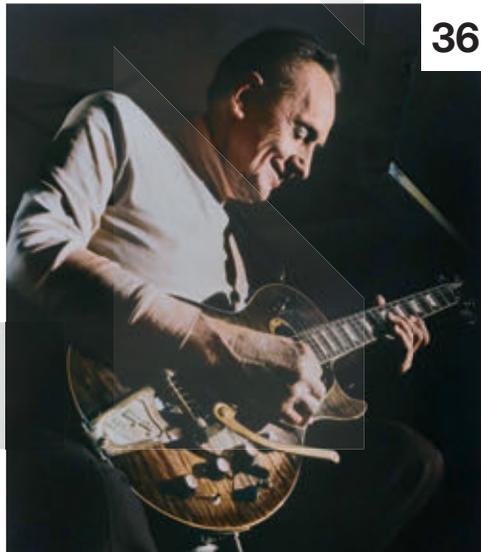
An exploration of Jumeirah's ethos, which is deeply rooted in culture and tradition

28 YASMINA EL ABD BREAKS THROUGH

After the series *Midterm* turned her into a touchstone for Gen Z audiences, the rising Egyptian star reflects on risk, mental health, family and the uneasy thrill of finding her voice both on screen and, unexpectedly, in music



12



36

36 GUITAR HERO

Why would anyone pay a premium for a brand-new instrument made to look half a century old?

40 JACQUET DROZ IS QUIRKY BY DESIGN

Built on an eccentric watchmaker's legacy, these watches are about much more than the time

42 A RETURN TO LIFE

The famed Le Gray hotel in central Beirut has suffered through the city's several crises, but now it is back and better than ever

44 SULTAN SOUD AL QASSEMI ON ART

Looking for meaning in our places of remembrance through *La Mise Au Tombeau* (1926) by Mahmoud Said

46 BEYOND DINOSAURS

The Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi in Saadiyat Cultural District is woven into a network of international institutions and local influences



46

50 REINVENTING MAHFOUZ

From flashy covers to graphic novels, Naguib Mahfouz's works are reaching a new generation of readers courtesy of Cairo's Diwan Publishing

52 MAKE IT LAST

In a world of disposable viral trends, our team takes a minute to slow down and pick some physical media worth cherishing long after the month is over

54 THE WATCHLIST

Our round-up of the best in film and television coming your way this month

55 TECHNOLOGY

From 360-degree cameras to automated feeding and air purifiers, we round up essentials for owners of furry friends

56 BLACK BOOK

Our round-up of the most interesting and noteworthy arrivals in fashion

58 ONE LAST THING

Emirati actress Meera Al Midfa answers our quick-fire questionnaire

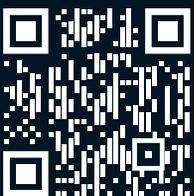


Podcasts

culture bites



A lively conversation
focused on the arts
scene in the UAE and the
ever-evolving landscape
of global entertainment



Follow on
[TheNationalNews.com](https://www.thenationalnews.com)



The National

EDITOR'S LETTER

When you've been editing lifestyle magazines for long enough, it's easy to become inured to the charms of even the world's most celebrated entertainers. I've been doing this a long time and have profiled – or edited profiles – of many of the biggest names in global culture. Which is why it came as a genuine surprise to read William Mullally's profile of the breakthrough Egyptian actress – and now musical artist – Yasmina El Abd.



At only 19, El Abd possesses a clarity and emotional intelligence that feels strikingly rare. Having already spent years in front of the camera, her standout role in Egyptian show *Midterm* has given her an unexpectedly public platform to speak up about mental health – and to do so with refreshing honesty.

“In Middle Eastern homes, we don't like to scratch past the surface of mental health,” she says. “*Midterm* is about not neglecting yourself when there's an issue at hand.”

And it's clear that for El Abd, that sense of grounding is inseparable from family.

“Having a family that understands ... is everything to me,” she says. It's something that we witnessed first-hand on the set of our cover shoot in Paris – where El Abd was attending a number of couture shows – and was accompanied by her supportive and quietly present mother.

Make no mistake: El Abd knows who she is and where she's going. There is a conviction to her choices that many twice her age would do well to study. I will be rereading the profile whenever I feel the need to refocus my efforts.

Elsewhere in the issue, we meet the chief executive of Italian jewellery house Damiani, explore the return of statement costume jewellery, and take a closer look at some of the season's most compelling Ramadan capsule collections. We visit Beirut's Le Gray Hotel as it comes back to life, meet a publisher breathing new energy into the legacy of Naguib Mahfouz, and step into the meticulous

world of guitar-makers who age brand-new instruments to look like they've lived a life on the road.

As ever, Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi returns with his monthly column – this time reflecting on the role of remembrance and memory in shaping the fabric of a city. It is the perfect way to enter this month with humility, self-reflection and gratitude.

Nasri Atallah



CARTIER



Show of metal

The latest Clash de Cartier collection brings pops of colour and a renewed sense of playfulness, writes **Sarah Maisey**

Since 2019, Clash de Cartier – a collection that includes earrings, rings, necklaces, pendants and bracelets – has been garnering fans with its deft balance of geometry and fluidity. It has become firmly established as a signature of the house. Angular studs, rounded beads and clous carrés (square nails) come together in pieces that play on duality – a language the maison now extends with new, flexible iterations.

For the first time, Clash de Cartier pieces are crafted in yellow gold, joining the original rose gold designs. The warmer hue is paired with colourful cabochon beads in pink chalcedony, onyx and red or green-dyed agate. Set in yellow gold, each bead is secured in place with a precise clous de Paris nail – a square holding a circle – heightening the contrast in the collection.

Scale, too, has been reworked with a sense of play, with necklaces featuring oversized onyx spikes and weighty gold pyramids.

But behind the ease lies formidable complexity. Crafted using ultra-precise modern machining and the traditional lost-wax process, a single piece can contain up to 600 individual components, each fitted by hand and calibrated for movement.

The yellow gold versions employ twice as many elements as their rose gold counterparts – even the sound they make when moving has been considered and perfected. At Cartier, it seems, no detail is ever too small.



The latest Clash de Cartier collection features bracelets crafted with colourful beads set in yellow gold, while a necklace is designed with oversized onyx spikes and weighty gold pyramids

Having Jessica Chastain, Sharon Stone and Sophia Loren as brand ambassadors would be an achievement for any major luxury conglomerate. For Damiani – the jewellery house that still describes itself as a “small family-run company” – it is little short of spectacular.

For Guido Damiani, the fourth-generation president of the Italian maison founded by his grandfather in 1924, celebrity has never been the point. “We are not a company that chooses ambassadors from a menu,” he says.

This philosophy explains how Chastain came into the Damiani orbit. Her interest was not initially jewellery, but glass – Venetian glass to be precise. She wanted to visit Venini, the glassmaker from Murano, owned by the Damiani Group. There she met Silvia Damiani, president of Venini and vice president of the Damiani group. The friendship that followed has evolved into a more formal partnership. “She likes our jewellery,” Guido says. “And we like her because, besides being a beautiful woman and very talented, she is very humble.”

That humility, he notes, is not always a given. When Chastain visited Dubai recently to open Damiani’s newly refurbished boutique in Dubai Mall, she stayed long after the formalities were over, greeting guests and posing for photos. “That’s not common,” he says with a laugh. “Usually, people take two or three pictures and leave. But we don’t work with that kind of person. It doesn’t fit our family.”

The idea of family runs through every aspect of the business. Ambassadorships, Guido insists, cannot be just transactional. “We need to like each other. If it’s just a question of money, it’s not going to work because we are not a big company with a huge budget.” It is why Loren, who represented Damiani in the 2000s, remains part of the family after the campaign ended. Now 91, the Italian actress still turns to the house when the occasion calls for something special. “Last year, she called my brother and said: ‘I’ll send you the picture of my dress – what jewellery do you suggest?’” Guido says with a smile.

And it’s the same with Stone. Their official collaboration may have ended more than a decade ago, but they still keep in touch. “We still send flowers for her birthday. If I’m in Los Angeles, she invites me for coffee.”

Damiani was founded in Valenza, Italy’s historic goldsmith district, by Enrico Grassi Damiani, a master gold worker whose reputation for skill and taste gained a following among Italy’s elite. His son, Damiano, expanded the business in the 1960s, and Guido took the helm in 1996. Since then, he has been guiding a careful expansion towards an international luxury group.

Yet, for all its growth, the company remains anchored in savoir faire. “Since my grandfather’s time, we have been supplying some of the biggest brands. We cannot name them of course, but if a customer wants something they cannot do, they come to us as we have the know-how. We have been doing this for three generations.” This depth of expertise,



All in the family

With some of the world’s most famous actresses as its ambassadors, Italian jeweller Damiani still counts family as its greatest strength, discovers Sarah Maisey

he believes, is what allows the brand to survive in an increasingly consolidated luxury market. “If you’re too small, it’s dangerous. You have to grow, but in the right way.”

Part of that strategy has been expanding its presence in the Middle East. Dubai, in particular, has become central. “We’ve been here a long time, but now we’re really developing the region,” says Guido. The brand has reopened its Dubai Mall boutique and expanded into Kuwait City, Doha, Bahrain and Riyadh, with Abu Dhabi to follow. The appetite, he says, is unmistakable. “The Middle East is becoming one of our most important markets.”

Timing, it seems, is on Damiani’s side. According to the Henley & Partners Wealth Migration Report, about 10,000 millionaires relocated to the UAE last year alone. “We’re happy to help them spend their money,” Guido says with a laugh.

Dubai is more than work, however – it’s also home. Guido has relocated his family to the UAE, drawn by its international mix and quality of life. “I love Italy, but it’s not as global,” he says. “Here, my children grow up with friends from all over the world. That’s very important to me.”

With the UAE named the world’s safest nation for the second time, safety is also key. “My children go out alone. Even my daughter. You can’t imagine that in Europe. It’s just impossible.” The lifestyle, too, is an important draw. “Usually, if you live by the sea, you don’t have a real city behind it. For example, we also have a house in Portofino. It’s beautiful, but it’s a village.”

Back to business, Damiani takes the sourcing of its jewels seriously, eschewing conflict stones and blood diamonds, reports of which rocked the industry a few decades ago. Since taking the helm, Guido has visited mines around the world and currently serves as president of the Ethics Committee of Assogemme, overseeing standards for coloured gemstones.

Lab-grown diamonds, however, leave him unmoved. “I don’t like them,” he says. “They are sold as green, but they’re not. The energy required to make them is enormous. And calling them ‘diamonds’ confuses the customer.” For him, jewellery is an emotional purchase. “You don’t need jewellery. You buy it for love, or celebration. So why give something fake?”

With Damiani recently celebrating its centenary, thoughts are naturally turning to succession, and Guido has already begun introducing his children to the business, bringing them to factories, trade shows and store visits around the world. “It’s important,” he says. “Already, they are growing up with the right mentality.”

For now, Guido remains at the helm, balancing tradition with expansion. After our chat, it was announced that the Damiani Group had purchased Swiss watchhouse Baume & Mercier.

As he guides the group to the next stage of its future, it shows that in a world of huge conglomerates and marketing budgets, family still counts for something.



American actress Jessica Chastain is the ambassador for Damiani, which is run by siblings, clockwise from top left: Giorgio, Sylvia and Guido

Right, bold and artistic pieces from Saint Laurent's spring/summer 2026 collection
 Far right, Kenneth Jay Lane was known for creating vibrant and glamorous costume jewellery



When it comes to statement jewellery, Nita Ambani and her family's formidable collection of carved emeralds, diamonds and pearls is hard to rival. They wear these jewels with evident pleasure, but not all their peers relish the security detail that accompanies such riches – prompting a renewed appetite for other, less conspicuous ways of making a statement.

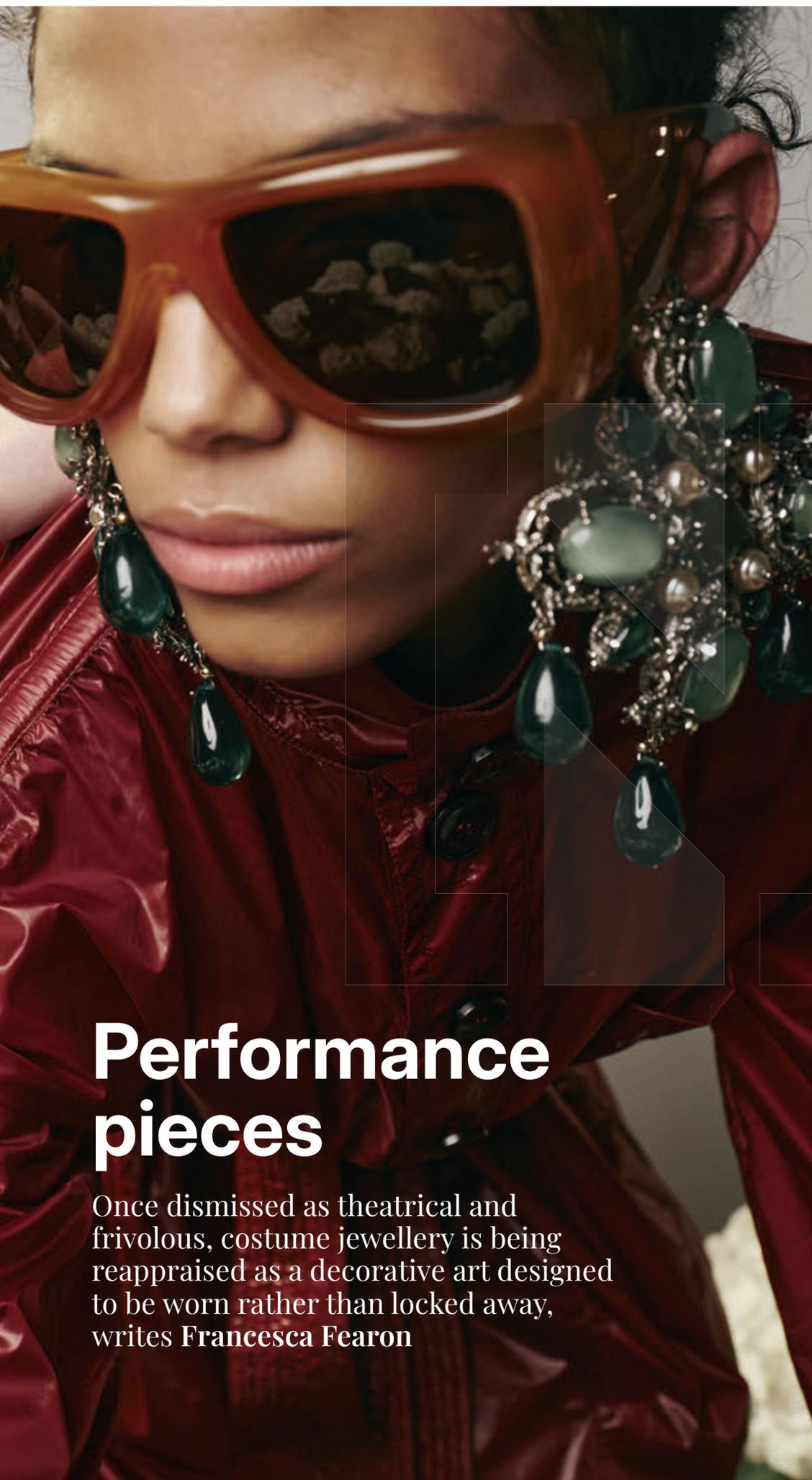
Designers have been championing a new strain of statement jewellery: bold and artistic pieces that make an impact without the price tag, because they are costume. These are not imitations, but opulent pieces, designed to be worn – and noticed – for their individuality. Driving the trend are Schiaparelli's gleaming gold anatomy pieces; Saint Laurent's chandelier earrings in pearl, resin and rhinestones; oversized wooden cuffs at Ferragamo; and earrings so long that they graze the rib cage from Valentino, Givenchy and Michael Kors.

The trend will be under the spotlight again this spring when Schiaparelli: Fashion Becomes Art opens next month at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The exhibition brings together Surrealist costume jewellery by Elsa Schiaparelli and collaborators such as Jean Cocteau and Salvador Dalí, alongside the boldly coloured anatomy pieces by current creative director Daniel Roseberry, produced from body castings. One notable exception, however, is the black velvet dress with the gold lung necklace worn by Bella Hadid at the Cannes Film Festival in 2021 – which was almost certainly not cast from life.

In a 2022 interview with *The National*, Roseberry said: "Jewellery was the first place where I felt the Surrealist tropes could live in a modern way. The anatomy feels like a code for the house, part of our language."

Ever restless, the creative director has since pushed his costume jewellery into new territory, most recently with voluminous, illuminated salt-stone necklaces that glowed under the moody lighting of Schiaparelli's spring/summer 2026 show.

Elsa Schiaparelli and Coco Chanel were instrumental in popularising costume jewellery in the 1930s. Chanel, in particular, took a notably relaxed view of value, freely mixing fine jewellery with ropes of faux pearls and historically inspired costume pieces – and in doing so, rewrote the rules of how jewellery could be worn.



Performance pieces

Once dismissed as theatrical and frivolous, costume jewellery is being reappraised as a decorative art designed to be worn rather than locked away, writes **Francesca Fearon**



CLEMENS KLENK; GETTY IMAGES

As jewellery historian Carol Woolton, co-author of *Costume Jewellery* – published by Taschen – notes: “Nowadays, it’s hard to imagine how radical it was to make glass and gilt into jewels that could be coveted, and flagrantly mix them with actual precious gems.”

Chanel created magnificent baroque jewels that were low in intrinsic value, but rich in style and bravura. Today, “costume” can suggest the theatrical – even the fanciful – and on the runway, some of the exaggerated fancy jewels are described as showpieces that don’t go into production. Increasingly, however, the opposite is true: the boldest pieces from Saint Laurent and Schiaparelli are making it into boutiques, where they are very much in demand.

Woolton believes the term costume jewellery came from Chanel, “who said jewellery was ‘to complete your costume’: the essence of pulling together a look with costume jewels customising your style”, she explains.

Once, bijou stones – glass and paste replicas – were used simply to imitate precious jewels. These couturiers instead gave costume



GETTY IMAGES; GOOSSENS PARIS



jewellery its own creative integrity, helping to make it respectable. Collectors now see such pieces not as fashion accessories, “but as a branch of the decorative arts”, says Woolton. “It’s really something that’s valued for its imagination more than it’s worth, and so it’s all about fantasy and style rather than wealth.”

Costume jewellery took firm root in America in the 1920s and 1930s, as Paris-trained craftsmen emigrated to New York after the First World War, bringing fine-jewellery techniques to paste and rhinestones. Freed from the cost constraints of precious materials, their enlarged creations were playful, uplifting, and designed to add flourish to an outfit. During and after the fabric rationing of the Second World War, a single brooch or clip became one of the few ways to express individuality.

Designs ranged from the floral and figurative to the witty – notably the influential New York costume jeweller Trifari and its famed “jelly belly” brooches, which depicted miniature animals with cabochon bellies carved from Lucite. New materials such as plastics, wood and Lucite came into play; the latter – still widely used in fashion today – is an acrylic that was originally developed for aircraft parts during the war.

Another key figure, Woolton notes, was Kenneth Jay Lane, who launched his business in 1962 and was soon dubbed the “king of

costume jewellery”. His vibrant and glamorous creations were worn by Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Wallis Simpson, whose Lane pieces later fetched remarkable sums at auction.

“He was well-connected,” Woolton says. “He was able to translate what some of the best-dressed women were wearing in real jewels into his faux jewels and because everyone loved him, everyone wore it.”

Although Lane died in 2017, his vintage-style brooches remain keenly sought after. Among contemporary designers, New Yorker Alexis Bittar stands out for his sculptural, tactile Lucite and metal pieces, while in France, Goossens Paris continues to make bold statements with gilded brass jewellery inspired by antique and Byzantine forms.

Robert Goossens founded his workshop in 1950 and became a close collaborator of Coco Chanel after meeting her in 1954, later working with Yves Saint Laurent in the 1970s. He also collaborated with Balenciaga, Dior, Givenchy and Christian Lacroix, whose bold gold brooches dominated the 1990s and early 2000s – and are now highly collectible.

“Even today, we carry the legacy of all these creative exchanges that nourished Robert Goossens’s work,” says a spokesperson for the maison. “We love drawing inspiration from this history, and by exploring his personal archives,



Left, Coco Chanel was instrumental in popularising costume jewellery in the 1930s. Opposite page, a handmade starfish cuff by Goossens Paris

we bring to life creations such as the fish motif featured in the latest Lagune collection.”

Fantasy, poetry and nature remain central to the house’s inspiration. “Audacity and creativity always defined our maison. We’ve always worked on jewellery with generous volumes,” the spokesperson adds – with brass allowing the atelier to push scale and create true statement pieces. The result is evident in the spring/summer 2026 Céleste necklace, a double row of large, textured medallions, as well as the handmade starfish cuff.

Beyond creativity, price is another force fuelling renewed interest in costume jewellery. With gold hitting record highs of late, the fine chains and charms recently seen on the runways at Chloé, Isabel Marant and elsewhere, have become a serious investment. American fine-jewellery designers, having absorbed inflation for months, are now passing those costs on to customers. So, if you are looking for jewellery that is impactful then brass patinated in gold or palladium may be the answer.

Materials range from rock crystal and rhinestones to colourful paste-glass cabochons, resin, shell and wood, much of it handmade rather than machine-made – and therefore time-intensive. But the value of costume jewellery lies in creativity, scale and handwork. And, frankly, does the pleasure of jewellery really need to be shared with a security detail?



A study in stillness

Amira Al Zuhair takes centre stage in Loro Piana's Ramadan collection, which features timeless designs. By **Katy Gillett**

Loro Piana's Ramadan 2026 capsule collection features elegant pieces that balance heritage craftsmanship with contemporary ease in clean, simple lines



Beneath the soft, rounded arches of a potter's studio in Doha, Qatar, model Amira Al Zuhair slowly twirls in the latest looks by Italian maison Loro Piana. The studio's Middle Eastern architecture is bathed in a warm, diffused light, casting gentle shadows that accentuate the curvature of the structure – the ideal setting for highlighting the Ramadan capsule collection's unstructured silhouettes in a neutral palette.

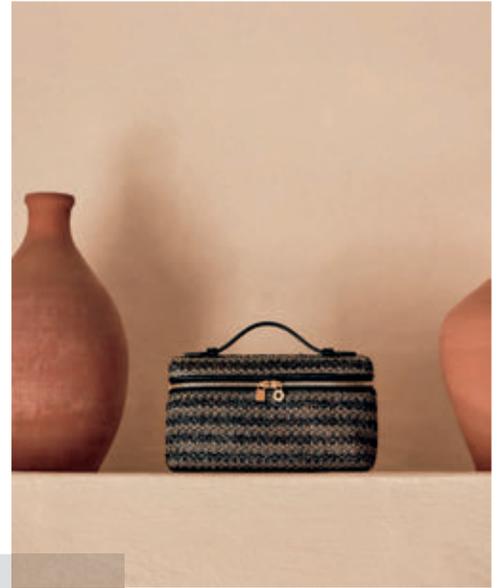
Shot by photographer Amina Zaher, the campaign imagines the studio as a contemplative space where stillness becomes a condition for creation, a philosophy that extends to the collection itself. The imagery draws a deliberate parallel between the artisanal gestures of clay and the craftsmanship behind each garment. Just as the potter shapes raw material with patient, deliberate movements, so too does Loro Piana craft each piece with unhurried precision, reflecting the relaxed yet refined nature of the new line.

Loro Piana has long built its reputation as a symbol of Italian excellence. Since its foundation, the house has pursued a goal of combining quality with understated elegance. The Ramadan 2026 capsule collection continues this legacy, presenting timeless pieces that balance heritage craftsmanship with contemporary ease in clean, simple lines that meet intricate three-dimensional details in precious fabrics such as silk, linen and wool.

Garments and accessories in natural colours are paired with rich desert tones of sage and







sand. They'd almost melt into the background if it weren't for the jacquard patterns and elaborate embroidery details, including golden threads and precious stone appliqué that catch the light.

The collection comprises a long skirt and trouser suits, alongside flowy dresses and kaftans, designed to create elegant looks with a loose but stylish fit. The silk black Dory dress, for example, is adorned with a delicate coriander flower print, while the sleeveless Audreen dress comes in a warm beige Summer Cardo Ajouré, creating a refined play of textures through the contrast between its airy ajour base with openwork and jacquard motifs.

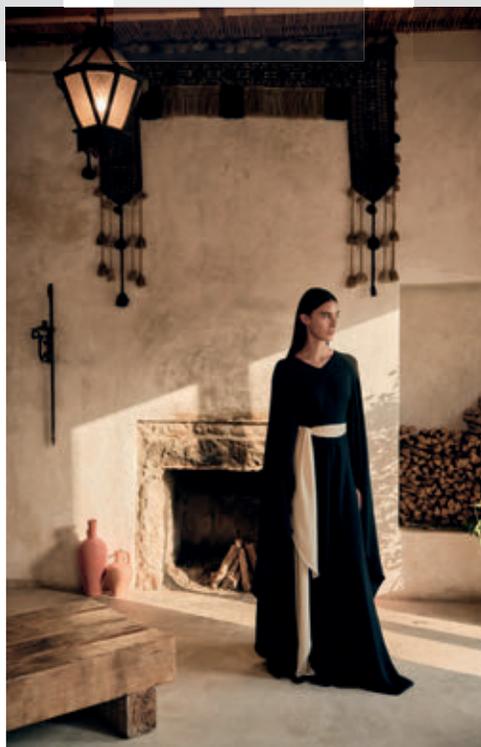
Touches of gold run throughout the collection, adding a subtle warmth to the neutral palette. The Spagna jacket comes in silk cloque jacquard with a subtle lamé sheen; the Ronny coat has been woven from tweed with twisted Lurex yarn; and the Yanis coat features silk jacquard brought to life by a delicate pattern of shimmering threads. The Vest waistcoat and Aisha skirt are crafted from Paillettes Tweed, an intricately woven twill fabric featuring a striped weave alternating between dark and light shades.

The light beige Palm cardigan, meanwhile, showcases Loro Piana's long-standing expertise in knitwear, featuring an ultralight base of pure silk contrasting with thicker yarns of linen, silk and cashmere, creating a striking three-dimensional pattern.

As for the accessories, the Extra Bag and Extra Pocket are available in the same seasonal fabrics as the ready-to-wear collection. The L19 model of the Extra Pocket bag stands out for its turquoise silk satin, featuring a thistle flower embroidery detail that took 28 hours to complete by hand. Elsewhere, the Vera mules in black and taupe stripes echo the collection's palette, while offering the same material refinement found throughout the line.

These versatile pieces highlight the maison's craftsmanship, as they're designed to move seamlessly from intimate family gatherings to celebratory evenings throughout the holy month and beyond.

The collection also extends to the next generation with a selection of smaller-sized pieces, featuring designs inspired by the men's and women's lines. These pieces allow families to dress in harmony as they share this special month together.



Touches of gold throughout the collection add warmth to the neutral palette

The collection includes long skirts, flowy dresses and elegant kaftans, as well as shoes and bags crafted from silk satin and woven twill



DOLCE & GABBANA; ALEXANDER MCQUEEN; MAX MARA

Season of intention

Ramadan is an important part of the annual fashion calendar, with local and global brands reflecting on the meaning of the month. By **Sarah Maisey**

As has become standard in recent years, a number of global fashion houses and regional brands release capsule collections especially for the holy month.

What was once a novelty has become a key addition to the international fashion calendar, reflecting the Gulf's growing importance as a market for the biggest luxury groups.

The era of simply gilding existing designs has gone. Designers are showing a deeper understanding of the holy month and the reconnection with family and friends at its heart, resulting in collections that are more thoughtful, elegant and aligned with each brand's core codes.

Regional labels have long led the way, championing modest dressing well before it became a global trend. With more choice than ever, there is no shortage of ways to approach Ramadan this year – and to do so in style.

DOLCE & GABBANA

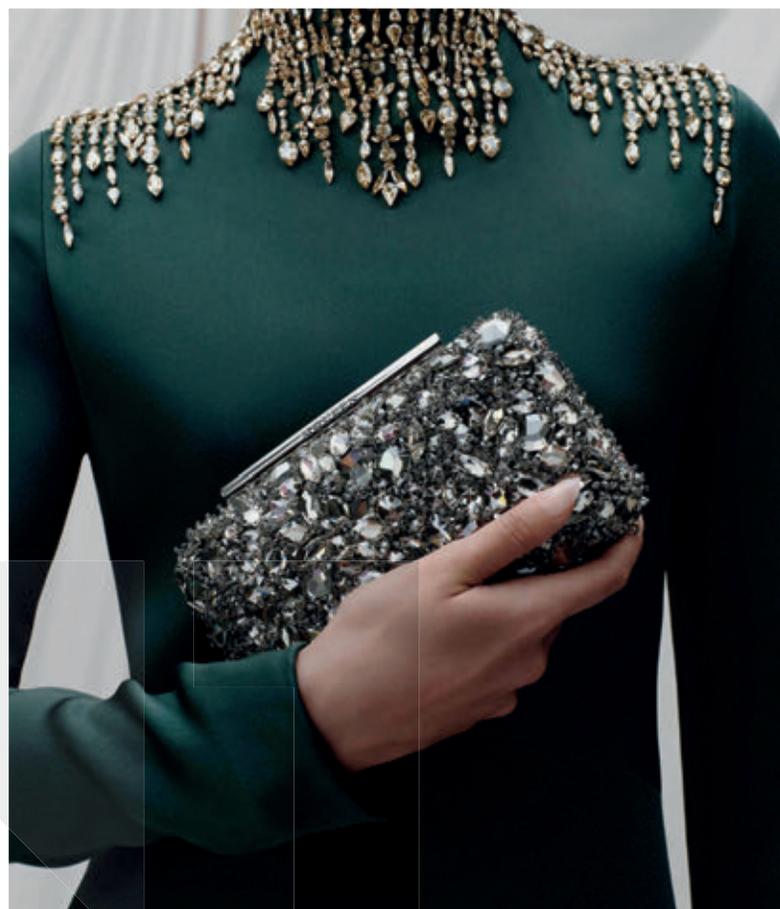
Italian design duo Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana lean into their trademark sumptuousness for this collection, through decadent velvets, rococo brocades, intense florals and edges trimmed with shimmering ribbons. Liquid metal cloth in blue and emerald is cut into chic separates, while ivory and green dresses are formed from goddess draping.

ALEXANDER McQUEEN

With sleek outlines and focused details, this collection by creative director Seán McGirr infuses the tailored line of McQueen with its signature fierce surfacing. Large crystals are scattered around necklines and shoulders, while the geometric clutches Manta and T-Bar Box come encrusted with jewels. The signature Knuckle Clutch, meanwhile, has been stretched to resemble an archival silhouette, and now comes in emerald and ivory satin.

MAX MARA

Known for its ability to embrace wearability for every occasion, Max Mara embraces the easy elegance of loose shirts and palazzo pants. In warm tones of caramel, camel, sand and



Clockwise from left, rococo brocades and florals feature in Dolce & Gabbana's Ramadan collection; bejewelled outfits and accessories dominate at Alexander McQueen; and Max Mara's pieces come in warm tones of caramel and mocha

mocha, roomy bishop-sleeve silk shirts are paired with wide-cut silken trousers, while soft patterning that resembles the subtle tonal shifts of marbled paper covers long dresses. In a typically discreet manner, button fronts and cuffs have a gentle scattering of shimmer.

LOUIS VUITTON

Louis Vuitton's sixth Mirage collection is its strongest yet. The maison pares things back to striking effect, with simple silhouettes in luxe materials such as glossy silk, lifted by details including mismatched crystal buttons. It has also collaborated with Lebanese designer Nada Debs, who designed a high-end bakhoor set shaped as a Monogram flower inspired by mashrabiya patterns, and a reimagined Capucines bag, lavished with crystals or asymmetric jewelled handles. The collection is available in the Middle East, select Asian markets and at Harrods.



BAMBAH

UAE brand Bambah is already adept at modest dressing and this season it delivers a series of co-ordinated dresses and abayas that perfect head-to-toe styling. Gold florals wrap fluid skirts, crisp stripes sharpen tie-front jalabiyas and long-sleeved dresses are finished with all-over shirring. Signature retro silhouettes and bold patterns remain, reworked into flowing, floor-length forms.

CELINE

The first Ramadan collection under creative director Michael Rider, this feels relaxed and roomy in a distinctly Parisian way. Pyjama sets come in khaki, ivory and wisteria, finished with contrasting piping, alongside strappy cage shoes threaded with tiny gold Celine logos. Accessories follow suit, with the classic Teen Nino and Small Triomphe Frame bags rendered in safari and chestnut, as well as deep navy and soft burgundy tones.

BURBERRY

Playing to its strengths, Burberry has reworked its famed trench in silk, transforming a functional outer layer into a relaxed, midi-length dress designed to pair with wide-legged silk trousers. The house check remains, rendered tone-on-tone in mulberry red, while the storm flap is exaggerated into a scarf-like panel fastening across the front. Finished with a matching red headscarf and a bag in the original check, now embellished with clear beads and heavy gold hardware, it's a lesson in restraint and the power of simplicity.

MAUZAN

A mainstay of the Emirati fashion scene, founded by artist and creative director Rafia Helal Bin Draï, Mauzan has been dressing the UAE since 1990. The brand's name translates to "rare pearl", and its 2026 offering centres on embellished abayas in bone, almond, sand, khaki, black and midnight blue, alongside an extensive range of traditional Emirati mukhawwar dresses, which are richly finished with talli embroidery.



LOUIS VUITTON; BAMBAH; BURBERRY; CELINE; MAUZAN



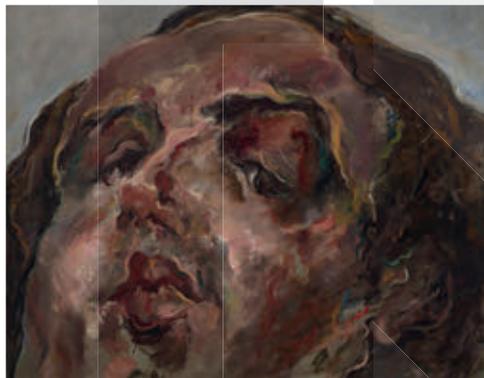
Clockwise from top, Mauzan offers embellished abayas; Strappy Cage shoes from Celine; Burberry's trench is rendered tone-on-tone in mulberry red; crisp stripes at Bambah; and Louis Vuitton's Capucines bag is lavished with crystals

THE MODERN MAJLIS

Jumeirah's ethos is deeply rooted in culture and tradition, writes **Katy Gillett**



N BERZHNOY; VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL; RAMZI AND SAEDA DALLOUL ART FOUNDATION DAF BEIRUT / ESTATE MARWAN; JUMEIRAH



Top and above left, Jumeirah was the hospitality partner for Marwan's London exhibition; and Nomad Abu Dhabi. Above right, art-inspired cake at Jumeirah Carlton Tower. Opposite page, Jumeirah Capri Palace puts a focus on art

When Christie's unveiled Marwan: A Soul in Exile – a 150-work retrospective of the Syrian artist Marwan Kassab Bachi (commonly known only by his first name) – at its London headquarters last July, the hospitality partner, Jumeirah, was perhaps unexpected.

The luxury hotel brand, best known for Dubai's sail-shaped, seven-star Jumeirah Burj Al Arab, had positioned itself at the centre of the UK's Arab art scene.

Guests of the British capital's Jumeirah Carlton Tower could book The Collector's Stay, combining guided exhibition tours with culinary journeys inspired by Marwan's cultural heritage. Art and hospitality merged into a single, coherent experience.

"This partnership marks a key milestone in Jumeirah's expanding cultural strategy," said Arnaud Morand, Jumeirah's global art adviser.

It was one milestone among many. In 2025, Jumeirah executed a strategic pivot that repositioned the brand as a serious player in global arts and culture, a transformation rooted in something far older than corporate strategy.

THE MAJLIS PRINCIPLE

"Our name itself is derived from the word 'jumr', meaning burning embers," explains Michael Grieve, chief brand officer at Jumeirah.

"A reference to the campfires that once guided travellers through the desert trade routes of the Arabian Peninsula. These fires served as beacons of warmth and safety, where

the nomadic Bedouin would welcome weary merchants and explorers, and offer them shelter, sustenance and, most importantly, a space to converse and exchange knowledge and ideas," he adds.

Those ancient gatherings had a name: the majlis, a social practice now recognised on Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. More than a physical space, the majlis represented a philosophy of hospitality where strangers became guests, conversation flowed freely and ideas crossed borders.

"When Jumeirah was established as a brand, we sought to translate this timeless spirit of connection and generosity into a modern hospitality experience," says Grieve.

From that moment in 1999, when Jumeirah changed the face of luxury hospitality with the opening of Burj Al Arab, to now, when it has properties across the Middle East, Europe and Asia, the group frames each property as a majlis, a gathering place for global culture, connection and conversation.

CULTURAL AWAKENING

Last April's Art Dubai proved fruitful for Jumeirah's artistic endeavours. Across its Madinat Jumeirah properties, the brand unveiled the inaugural Jumeirah Art Journey, 16 works by artists including Mona Hatoum, Zeinab Al Hashemi, Azza Al Qubaisi and Ali Chaaban, curated by Morand in collaboration with Leila Heller Gallery. The exhibition

transformed hotel corridors and public spaces into gallery experiences. Guests encountered art organically, between the lobby and the pool, the restaurant and the spa.

That same week, Jumeirah hosted the Dubai launch of *+971: 50 Emirati Creatives Shaping the UAE*, a Rizzoli publication edited by Myrna Ayad that spotlights local talent across architecture, visual arts, design, film, music and literature. The event was a celebration of the creative ecosystem Jumeirah now looks to champion.

Summer brought the Christie's collaboration. Then, in September, Jumeirah Capri Palace launched its inaugural Contemporary Art Prize in partnership with the Festival del Paesaggio Anacapri. Two winning artists received residencies at the hotel, cash prizes and permanent placement in the property's collection, distinguishing Jumeirah as not only a sponsor, but also a patron.

By November, Jumeirah had become the official hospitality partner for Nomad's Abu Dhabi debut, the design fair's first Middle Eastern event. International collectors, curators and designers gathered at Jumeirah Saadiyat Island, positioning the brand at the intersection of art, design and regional cultural ambition.

EMBEDDING CULTURE IN THE BRAND

What separates Jumeirah's approach from conventional sponsorship is integration. Culture isn't an add-on; it's embedded in the guest experience.

TN COLLABORATION



At Jumeirah Capri Palace, Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola recently reimagined the MarioRita Suites, named after the visionary couple whose 1950s boutique once occupied the site. Embodying her approach, which she once called “emotional modernism”, Urquiola worked with local artisans on ceramics, fabrics and bespoke mirrors, creating spaces that translate Capri’s light and landscape into contemporary form.

In Dubai, Emirati artist Mattar Bin Lahej has woven Arabic calligraphy and sculpture into Jumeirah Al Naseem’s architecture. Meanwhile, Saudi-British poet Maryam Ghouth wrote *The Keepers of This Land* exclusively for Jumeirah, with verses that explore how “generosity resides not only in what we offer in the moment, but what endures after we are no longer present”.

Ghanaian-Dutch director Emmanuel Adjei, known for collaborations with Beyoncé and Madonna, also created Jumeirah’s recent campaign film. “I really see hospitality as a complete language,” Adjei reflected during production. “It’s not just about service; it’s about belonging.”

This cultural ethos also extends to culinary experiences, from the shared meze in the Middle East to pastries infused with local ingredients, used as vehicles for storytelling. “Food has always been the best way to connect cultures,” says Tom Coll, Burj Al Arab’s executive pastry chef. “It is a way to understand each other without speaking the same language.”

MISSION 2030 AND BEYOND

Jumeirah’s cultural ambitions are part of its Mission 2030, a strategy to double the brand’s portfolio through international expansion. New properties will carry the arts-forward ethos from inception. These include Jumeirah The Red Sea in Saudi Arabia, which is set along pristine coastlines and coral reefs, promising what Grieve calls “barefoot luxury”, as well as Jumeirah Le Richemond in Geneva, currently undergoing a full renovation.

Each destination, says Grieve, is “thoughtfully designed, blending curated artwork, cultural context and conscious consideration for the surrounding community, offering guests the feeling of a life well led”.

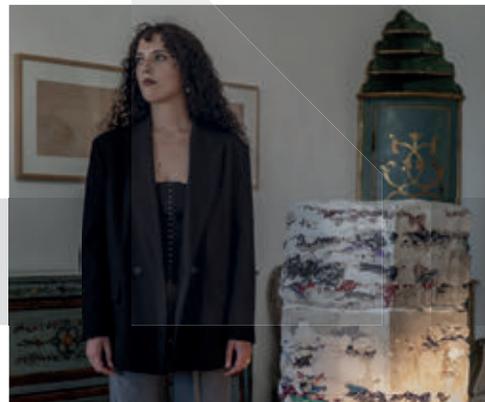
The brand’s renewed focus favours intimate properties – with up to 150 keys – and emphasis on suites, villas and branded residences. After all, smaller-scale properties enable deeper cultural integration. A bit like the majlis.

“The majlis represents more than just a physical space,” explains Grieve. “It embodies a forum for community engagement, cultural exchange and the forging of lifelong bonds.”

Today, every Jumeirah property represents a contemporary majlis, he continues. “From the art-rich Jumeirah Capri Palace to the superyacht-inspired landmark that is Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab in Dubai.

“Today, we continue to embody that same spirit of warmth, generosity and joy that defined those ancient desert gatherings, creating spaces where cultures converge, ideas flourish and stories are shared,” he says.

For Jumeirah, luxury hospitality’s future lies not in thread counts or amenity lists, but in cultural substance. It is as the ancient Bedouin proverb holds: “When a guest comes, he is a prince. When he leaves, he is a poet.”





Left, the Maltese Falcon superyacht is a Jumeirah Privé Experience. Opposite page, top and centre, in September last year, Jumeirah Capri Palace held its inaugural Contemporary Art Prize, offering two artists residencies at the hotel and permanent placement in the property's collection. Opposite page, bottom, Jumeirah Carlton Tower offers The Collector's Stay, combining guided exhibition tours with culinary journeys.



When Jumeirah was established, we sought to translate the timeless spirit of connection into a modern hospitality experience.

JUMEIRAH

YASMINA ELABD BREAKS THROUGH

On the cover and opposite page: Garment-dyed cotton satin blouson jacket; poplin shirt; embroidered cashmere shirt; embroidered cotton satin midi-skirt; silk socks; matelassé nappa leather mules; and Arcadie matelassé nappa leather mini-bag, all from Miu Miu



After the series *Midterm* turned her into a touchstone for Gen Z audiences, the rising Egyptian star reflects on risk, mental health, family and the uneasy thrill of finding her voice both on screen and now, unexpectedly, in music.
By **William Mullally**

It's been weeks since *Midterm* aired its final episode, and Yasmina El Abd isn't ready to move on. "I can't really let go of Tia," El Abd tells *TN Magazine*. "This is the first time that's ever happened to me. I've never had this experience with any other character. Now, I see a camera and I immediately have to become her – which surprises me, considering how difficult she was to embody at first."

She's not alone in that attachment. The university-set Egyptian series has become something of a touchstone for younger viewers across the region, circulating widely online and settling into the shorthand of Gen Z audiences. For many, Tia is already inseparable from El Abd herself.

At 19, El Abd now finds herself in rare territory. *Midterm* is her first lead role, and it has accelerated her transition from scene-stealing supporting performer to a star willing to take on material many of her peers avoid.

It is a moment she recognises from watching one of her heroes. In 2019, Zendaya made a comparable leap with HBO's *Euphoria*, choosing to meet a young audience at its most exposed through material that offered little protection if it failed.

"I don't think I've ever felt anxiety in the way I felt while shooting *Midterm*," El Abd says. "It was such a big risk to put my name on something so big, so long and so different."

In Egypt, that kind of risk can carry real consequences. A series that pushes too far can trigger fierce online backlash, sometimes escalating into controversy that threatens entire careers. Even so, what mattered most to El Abd was moving beyond the safe bets that had begun to frustrate her.

"I was struggling to find roles that catered to my age group," the actress explains. "It was either playing much older – which felt disingenuous and impossible to perform honestly – or much younger. I didn't feel creatively fulfilled in any way."

In some ways, El Abd feels like she reverse-manifested *Midterm* by convincing herself she'd never find anything like it. She's never one to write down her goals – "I obsess over things, but I don't want to jinx them" – but whenever

This page: Embroidered cashmere cardigan; pinstriped poplin shirt; pinstriped midi-skirt; printed silk scarf; leather belt; and Caprice embroidered nappa leather bag, all from Miu Miu

Opposite page: Cashmere polo sweater; pinstriped poplin shirt; micro pinstriped poplin trousers; printed silk scarf; and leather belt, all from Miu Miu



anyone asked her what her dream role would be, she'd respond: anything that delves into the mental health struggles of young people, right down to their most uncomfortable truths. "In Middle Eastern homes, we don't like to scratch past the surface of mental health," she says.

Midterm, in turn, is precisely about what happens when those issues are ignored entirely – when people hide their true selves from those around them in order to be accepted. El Abd's character Tia, as audiences discover in later episodes, is a manipulative, compulsive liar. While the reveal risks casting her as a villain, the series is imbued with enough empathy to make it feel more like a cautionary tale.

"Her entire plan was just based on not wanting to be alone," El Abd says. "It came from insecurity and anxiety – which can trigger extreme ways of handling yourself and situations. It was all born in pure pain. *Midterm* is about not neglecting yourself when there's an issue at hand."

As happy as she has been that Gen Z feels seen in the material, that wasn't her only hope. Quietly, she wanted parents to see it too – to understand the role they play, often unknowingly, in perpetuating those dynamics.

I don't think I've ever felt anxiety in the way I felt while shooting *Midterm*

To her surprise, that is happening as well.

"I was on a plane the other day and the stewardess told me she'd watched the show," El Abd says. "She said it made her re-evaluate

how she deals with her daughter. That's the nicest feedback I've ever received – my dream scenario.

"There's a huge lack of understanding and patience. It's just: 'Do this, do that, don't talk back.' It's not a healthy relationship – and this is a global issue. So many of these problems are born in the home."

Part of the reason El Abd has been able to blossom creatively – and into the woman she is becoming – is the relationship she has had with her parents.

"Having a family that understands, that has given me the space to try and figure myself out and supports me through it all, is everything to me," she says.

Even so, growing up, there were parts of herself she kept private. While her family remembers her as a confident, driven child – particularly in light of her budding stardom – her inner world felt very different.

"I don't think I was a very confident child," El Abd says. "I had a kind of fake Disney arrogance, because I would copy whatever I saw on screen. I was always Sharpay Evans from *High School Musical*, reincarnated as an Arab girl with brown hair."





“I was actually very shy,” she continues. “The only thing I felt confident in was anything to do with the performing arts. Whether I was watching a movie, listening to music, singing or dancing, I felt I had something special – and I couldn’t ever let that go.”

El Abd comes from a musical family – her father was a piano player for 45 years – and music has always been a constant presence. As acting became more demanding, it also became a refuge. “I can’t sit in silence,” she says. “I always need music or something playing in the background.”

However, the actress didn’t expect music to re-enter her life in quite the way it has. As part

of *Midterm*, El Abd released a song, *Damma*, in December. She never anticipated a response – she was so sick during recording that the final release used her demo vocals. To her surprise, the track has resonated. For six weeks and counting, it has hovered near the top of Billboard’s regional charts, racking up millions of streams alongside the success of the series.

As intentional as El Abd has become about her acting career, the idea of adding “pop star” to her CV still feels abstract. As she considers what kind of musician she might want to be, she admits the prospect is overwhelming. “As an actor, you’re a blank canvas,” she says. “You have a director, a writer, a producer – they tell

This page: Chambray dress; cashmere crew-neck shirt; printed silk scarf; silk socks; matelassé nappa leather mules; and matelassé Wander bag, all from Miu Miu

Opposite page: Embroidered cotton satin midi-dress; pinstriped poplin shirt; and printed silk scarf, all from Miu Miu



This page: Embroidered cady maxi-dress; and Ivy embroidered satin mini-bag, both from Miu Miu
Opposite page: Cashmere and silk cardigan; cashmere crew-neck sweater; chambray midi-skirt; printed silk scarf; and Arcadie embroidered nappa leather bag, all from Miu Miu



you where to go and what to do. And if it doesn't go well, people understand it wasn't all you.

"In music, there's no distance. A musical artist needs an identity – through their sound, their wardrobe, their artistic direction. You need to know who you are and own it. And if a song is bad, they blame you. You need very thick skin to take that on. That's all very scary for me."

She thinks back to something Zendaya once said in an interview – that she feels comfortable on a film set because she's hiding behind someone else, free to be as bold or strange as she likes.

"In music, you have to get to know yourself as a human being," El Abd says. "You have complete creative agency. The most daunting part for me is trying to figure that out. I hate going into something without knowing what it is – and that's exactly what music is like. It's just you, the studio and yourself."



In Middle Eastern homes, we don't like to scratch past the surface of mental health

As always, her family is encouraging her forward. "They're all so excited about this," she says. "They keep asking: 'Why don't you want to do it?' And I'm just like: 'I'm not ready.'"

But now, with this success, they're saying: "There's nothing left to say – you just need to go for it." I think I'm scared of trying, but that's a fear I need to push past. Maybe I'll drop an EP," she adds.

At times, it all feels overwhelming.

"It's weird to be part of something so big at such a young age – to feel like the smallest fish in the biggest pond," she says. "You have to be able to say 'I'm here', without being obnoxious. You have to fight for yourself without being rude or being told you have an attitude problem – which is huge in this industry."

That, in part, is why she values having a family willing to help shoulder those pressures – allowing her to focus not only on the work, but also on the audience she made *Midterm* for.

"I feel like I'm gaining people's trust," she says. "That's not something I take lightly. It makes me think: I earned it. Now I need to keep it."

FASHION DIRECTOR: **SARAH MAISEY**

PHOTOGRAPHER: **LUCIE SASSIAT**

PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT: **ANAIS RAMOS**

PRODUCER: **CAROLINE BENTO**

STYLIST: **MARIE CATTIAUX**

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: **AUDREY PAYET**

SHOT AT: **STUDIO ZERO, PARIS**

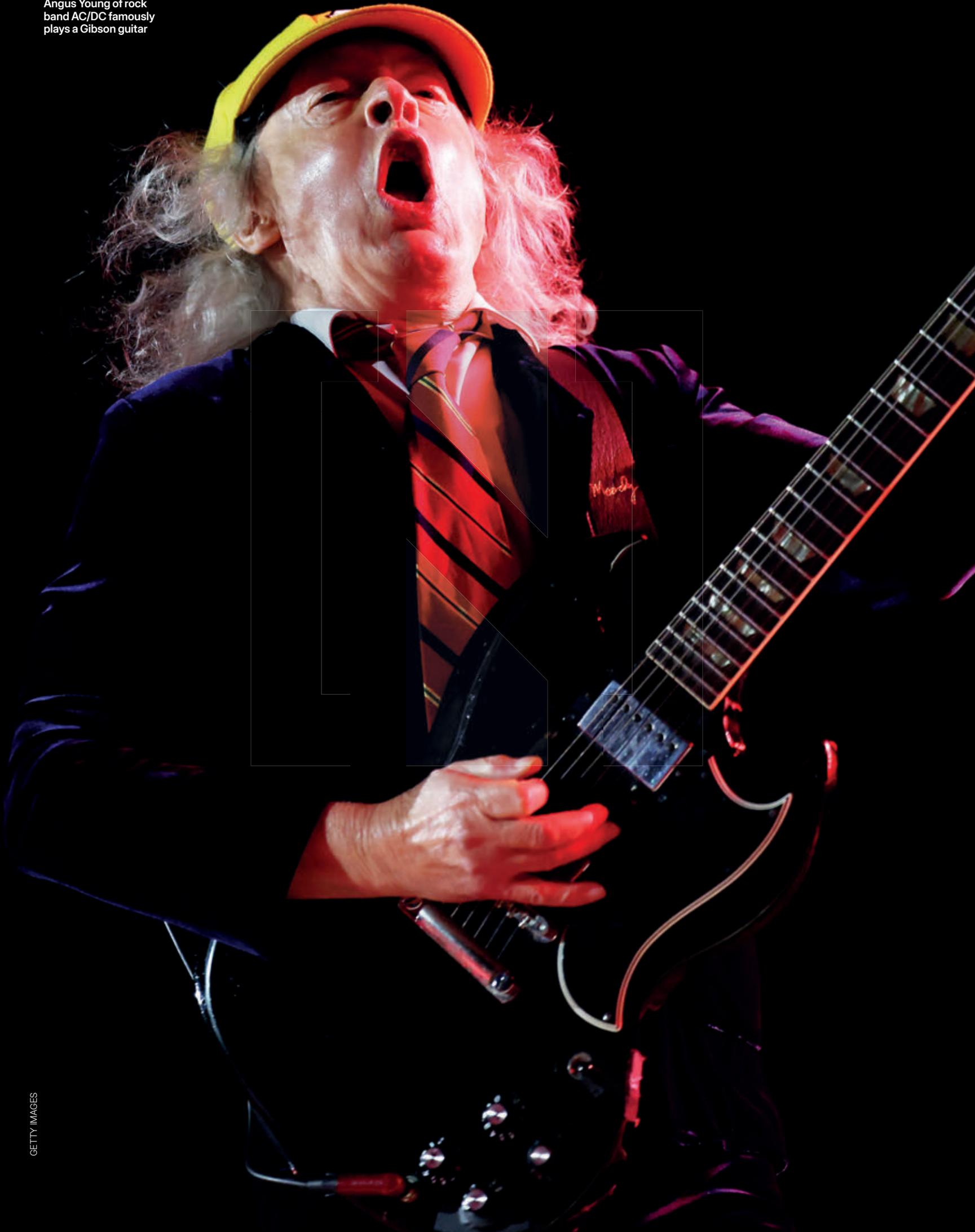
SPECIAL THANKS: **LYNN BOU MALHAM**

PHOTO SHOOT CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MIU MIU



MUSIC

Angus Young of rock band AC/DC famously plays a Gibson guitar





Why would anyone pay a premium for a new instrument made to look half a century old? Josh Sims finds out on a tour of Gibson's custom workshop

GUITAR

HERO

Dustin Wainscott might wonder why he's deliberately scratching up a brand-new electric guitar – and not just any guitar, but a Gibson, one of the most famous names in the business.

“People want the look of a guitar that’s been played at every major venue in the world for the past 50 years,” says Wainscott, a guitar-maker at the company’s headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, and director of its customisation workshop, Made to Measure. “They want the experience of owning an original vintage model – not just the look, but all the wear marks that it might have too.”

That is why Wainscott finds himself working with some specially made, if eccentric, tools: railroad ties fitted with bunches of keys, for example, or belt buckles mounted on a handle to form a kind of flail. Carefully applied, they wear away patches of lacquer on a guitar’s body, even adding the occasional scrape or score. The same lacquer can also be treated to create what vintage-guitar obsessives call “checking” – the fine cracking that develops as brittle finishes age and the wood beneath expands and contracts over decades. The result is a guitar of yesteryear, made yesterday.

Such instruments are constructed entirely from scratch as part of Gibson’s new custom programme, which allows fans to commission the guitar of their dreams. It begins with selecting the very blank of maple or mahogany from which the piece will be cut – choosing just the right “flame” in the grain – before settling on the precise shade of Gibson’s signature sunburst finish.

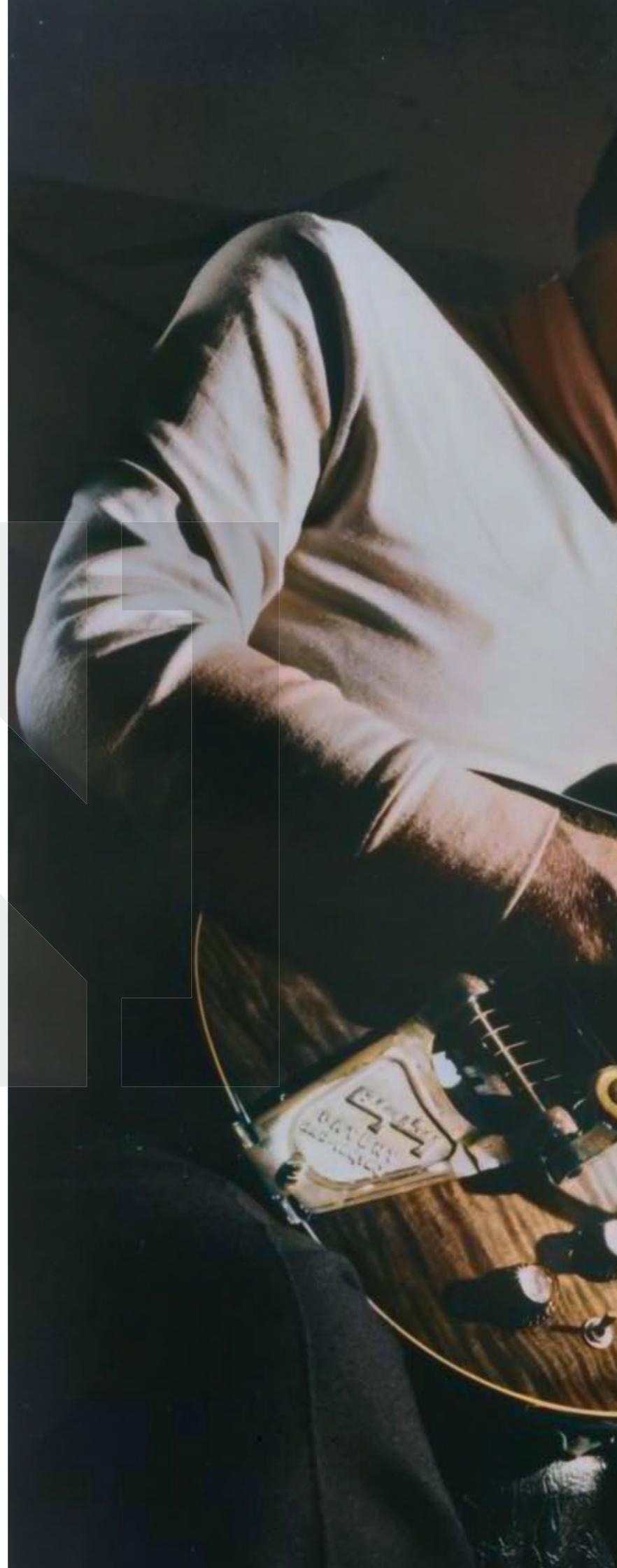
“Customers usually want to hand-pick materials themselves [which they can currently do online, or on-site in Nashville or London], or match the colour to a photograph or even a specific Pantone reference,” says Wainscott. “We had one customer who matched his guitar to an old MG sports car. And while some just want a certain colour or a certain detail changed on their custom model, we also get clients who just go into custom overload and change everything.”

That might include selecting a particular neck profile to suit the player’s hand size. And since Gibsons aren’t modular – unlike rival Fender’s

GETTY IMAGES



Fleetwood Mac's Peter Green, above, photographed with a Gibson guitar designed by Les Paul, right, whose 1950s designs sell at auction for more than \$1 million



guitars – a great deal of work goes into such bespoke mixing and matching. Then come choices around pickups, jack plates, whammy bars and fretboards, sometimes inlaid with initials in mother-of-pearl. If a customer wants diamonds set into the body, or parts fashioned from gold or titanium, the Gibson custom workshop will attempt it.

“It’s very rare that we’ll say ‘we can’t do that,’” says Lee Bartram, Gibson’s head of marketing and cultural influence. “And if we do, it’s usually because of engineering parameters that might negatively affect the sound. We don’t want to mess too much with the overall Gibson vibe.”

Depending on the complexity of the order, a completed custom guitar takes anywhere from four months to a year to deliver, and costs between Dh40,000 and Dh80,000. Even then, it may never be played. Gibson guitars are sufficiently design and craft icons that some buyers acquire them simply to hang on a wall or stand in a corner – a silent suggestion of a rock ‘n’ roll life their career in finance never quite delivered. Just look at the cover of *Blues on the Bayou* to see how a guitar can sometimes



Most customers are huge guitar fans, naturally, and some even sell the instruments they have in order to buy this one custom Gibson

outshine even a player with the soulful face and untouchable talent of American blues musician BB King.

“But most of our customers are huge guitar fans, naturally, and some even sell the guitars they have in order to buy this one custom Gibson,” explains Wainscott. “This type of guitar tends to be ordered by people who have been playing the instrument for some time and really know what they want.”

And what they really want, he says, is an original Gibson – something incredibly rare and expensive. “Few people will ever get to see one, let alone play one,” Wainscott says. The next best thing is a custom guitar made using exactly the same processes and materials as the vintage models. That includes less durable, less efficient – but more romantic – animal-hide glues and nitrocellulose lacquers, finishes long abandoned by much of the modern guitar industry.

“But these outmoded materials allow the instrument to sing in a way that new styles of finish won’t,” Wainscott explains. “The result is a guitar that feels old in the hand. It has to me the feeling I get from an old baseball glove that’s been properly broken in, that’s been with me over the years, and that, in contrast, makes a new glove just feel horrible.”

But why the fuss over a Gibson guitar? If recommendation is persuasive, it may help to know that there’s barely a rock star who hasn’t favoured playing a Gibson, including Queen’s Brian May, Metallica’s Kirk Hammett, Black Sabbath’s Tony Iommi, as well as Joan Jett, Jeff Beck, Angus Young, Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and Pete Townshend.

Sound quality is part of the appeal, but so is history. Gibson pioneered the electric guitar with the EH-150, developed in 1935, and 75 years ago, effectively invented the modern solid-body electric by partnering with Les Paul on the single-cut mahogany design that still bears his name. The company also introduced some of the most recognisable shapes in guitar history, from the “horned” body to the Flying V, launched in 1958.

Les Paul himself embodied the same obsessive devotion now seen in Gibson’s made-to-measure customers. After a car crash in 1948 left his elbow shattered, surgeons offered to fix it permanently in a single position. Paul chose the angle that would still allow him to play guitar. When they appear at auction – which is rare – 1950s Les Paul guitars sell for more than \$1 million.

Not, Bartram is quick to point out, that owning a Gibson – even an original – will turn you into a guitar hero. “A customer who orders a guitar built to the exact specifications of one played by Fleetwood Mac’s Peter Green isn’t suddenly going to sound like Peter Green,” he says with a laugh. “It’s great to own a guitar associated with a legendary artist, but their sound ultimately came from the player, not the instrument.” Budding Jimmy Pages have been warned.

HOROLOGY

When Boston Dynamics recently unveiled an update of its Atlas robot, commentators marvelled at its eerily human movement, the fluidity of its walk and softness of its gestures, despite a blank, disc-like face. The latest arrival from the offshoot of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it felt new, futuristic and faintly disturbing.

Perhaps the same sensation accompanied a very different unveiling: of three mechanical “humanoids” by Swiss horologist Pierre Jaquet-Droz to Europe’s royal courts in the 1770s. Called The Writer, The Draughtsman and The Musician, this trio of seated figures have delicately painted faces, coiffed human hair and fashionable silk clothing. They write poetry, sketch drawings and play music, powered not by electricity or AI, but by hand-cut gears and cams rotating in impossibly complex configurations. Their movements are delicate enough to dip a quill into ink without blotting the page and play music without missing a note.

Three centuries on, these automata remain as captivating as they are uncanny. Still fully functional (they give demonstrations at the Neuchâtel Museum of Art and History), the engineering behind them asserts Pierre Jaquet-Droz was not merely a watchmaker, but a visionary years ahead of his time, who helped lay the groundwork for what humans and machines have achieved.

The weight of this is not lost on Alain Delamuraz, who today leads the Swiss Jaquet Droz company as chief executive. “Our tradition is innovation,” he explains. “We have been so innovative for nearly 300 years, it has become permanent.”

Perhaps as proof, despite leading a watch house, he prefers not to use the term at all. “We make pieces of art that sometimes indicate the time,” he says with a smile. Since his arrival, Delamuraz has quietly undone much of the brand’s commercial expansion of the 2010s. All 176 points of sale have closed and annual production has reduced from 5,000 pieces to only 100. Today, anyone wishing to acquire a Jaquet Droz must travel to its headquarters in La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland. Prices have risen accordingly, from about \$50,000 to more than \$500,000.

By conventional metrics, it sounds risky, yet it is part of embracing the remarkable legacy that Jaquet Droz embodies. “We are 50 people today, and we were 50 people when we made 5,000 watches a year,” Delamuraz says.

“The fewer pieces you make, the higher the level must be. That is why we only make for kings.” It is not hyperbole. Pierre Jaquet-Droz counted among his patrons the monarchs of Spain, Britain and France, as well as the Qianlong Emperor of China.

Delamuraz prefers not to see the past as a template. Instead, he quotes French writer Victor Hugo. “The future is a door, and the key is the past. I love that because this is exactly what we try to do. We take all the inspiration of heritage and legacy to construct the future.” He is, however, wary of falling into the trap of allowing that same heritage to become a constraint. “The real question is not what Pierre Jaquet-Droz did,”

Jacquet Droz is quirky by design

Swiss brand built on an eccentric watchmaker’s three-century-old legacy is about much more than telling the time, as its disruptive designs prove. By Sarah Maisey

The Tourbillon Skelet Ceramic Skull Pointillism features a skull and crossbones carved in gold and decorated with 3,000 hand-painted dots



he says. "But what he would do today. He was disruptive. He was a little crazy. So we must remain a little crazy."

The watch on his own wrist is a prime example. A Grande Seconde Skelet Sapphire, it is a fluorescent yellow-strapped piece, with a skeletonised movement that appears to float inside a sapphire crystal case. Although inspired by an 18th-century pocket watch, it is so contemporary and so unlike conventional high-end watch architecture, as Delamuraz notes with a laugh, that it is often mistaken for a Swatch.

Other pieces lean more to the theatrical. The Tourbillon Skelet Ceramic Skull Pointillism features a skull and crossbones carved in gold and decorated with 3,000 hand-painted dots, while the Charming Bird Titanium features an automaton bird only 13.5 millimetres tall that whistles, flaps and spins. "It's the first and only whistling bird watch in the world," he says. The birdsong is created via air pumps at 8 and 10 o'clock and inspired by a 1770s singing bird in a cage. Now with a 47mm Grade 5 titanium case, it is a piece of history remade in modern materials. Another piece is the Imperial Dragon Automaton Sapphire Opal that



From top, the Imperial Dragon Automaton Sapphire Opal watch designed by John Howe; the Charming Bird Titanium piece is the only whistling bird watch in the world; and the Tourbillon Skelet Sapphire is inspired by an 18th-century pocket watch



features a dragon coiled around the dial, which was designed by Canadian illustrator John Howe, best known for his concept design work on the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* films. At the press of a button, the creature flicks its tail, raises the caudal crest on its spine, blinks and opens its mouth. One steely claw clasps a large Akoya pearl at 6 o'clock. "Howe designed this dragon for us inspired by the [JRR Tolkien] books and our artist sculpted and engraved it in three-dimensional gold. We animated it and gave it life," says Delamuraz.

None exist without a buyer, however. Each commission is one-of-one, a collaboration shaped around the collector's own mythology, be it tennis, rock stars, dragons or camels in lavender fields. "It is always between two artists," he says. "The one who makes it, and the one who will live with it. Each piece is different, and the only common point is our know-how."

With a young atelier – the average age of the artisans is only 34 – Delamuraz encourages his team to experiment and be unafraid of failure. One idea being explored is painting enamel on to glass to

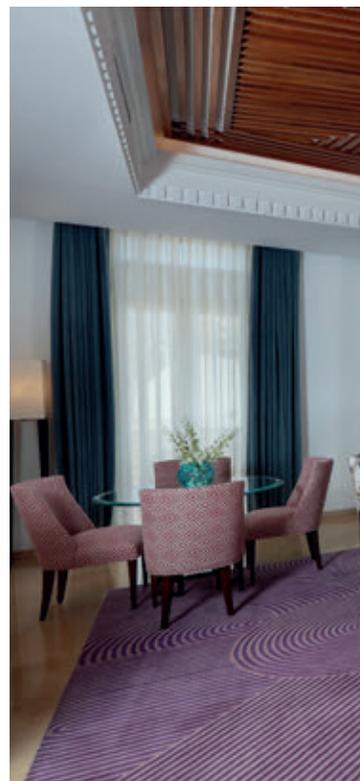
create modern stained glass. That nothing usable has transpired yet is beside the point. "Part of their job is to create and not to repeat what they have always done. Pierre Jaquet-Droz created a new way. We have to keep that spirit and not follow others," he explains. "Luxury in the last decades has been a commercial transaction. We have to develop a personal relationship, as there is no real luxury at this level without emotion."

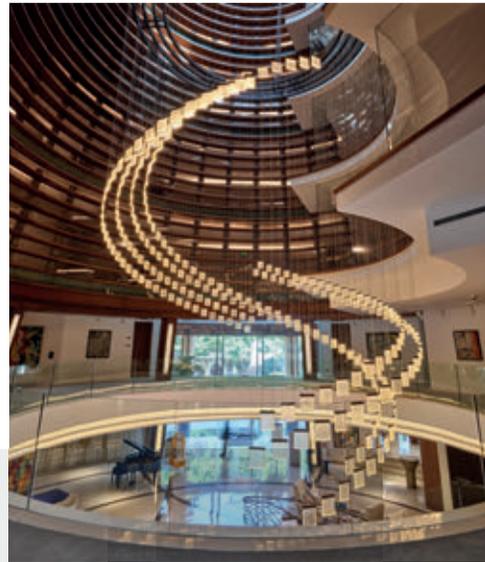
In an era defined by digital abstraction, Delamuraz's ambition is human. "We want to rehumanise luxury," he says. "And put the human being back at the centre." It is not time, he suggests, that these objects ultimately measure. "Money is useless as long as you have money. Time is useless as long as you have time." He adds, after a pause: "So perhaps time itself is the greatest luxury of all."



A RETURN TO LIFE

Le Gray hotel in central Beirut has suffered through the city's several crises, but now it is back and better than ever. By **Nasri Atallah**





LE GRAY

Le Gray hotel sits opposite Beirut's Martyrs' Square, far left, and features a dramatic central atrium rising through the building, left, drawing guests up towards the rooms, bottom

Hotels occupy a peculiar place in the mythology of cities. Name a major metropolitan and a hotel quickly follows: The Savoy in London. The Plaza in New York. The Crillon in Paris. The Burj Al Arab in Dubai. For decades, Beirut had the Phoenicia. Then, in 2009, a small boutique hotel called Le Gray came for its crown.

It arrived just as the city felt briefly renewed. Le Gray drew a new generation of movers and shakers, and landed – as did the rest of the city – on must-visit lists across the global travel press. The hotel sits opposite Martyrs' Square, alongside the Annahar building, City Hall and the redeveloped downtown – an address that placed it at the centre of events as much as of glamour. Beirut, once again, felt open for business.

But permanence has never been Lebanon's strong suit. The energy of the early 2010s slowly gave way to a succession of overlapping crises.

The 2015 protests over the rubbish crisis filled Martyrs' Square. By 2019, a full-blown revolution turned the area into an intermittent battleground. Then came August 2020, and the blast that shut the property for good – or so it seemed.

Until late November, when Le Gray began its quiet return to life.

When I visited, parts of the hotel were still unopened. The gradual reopening mirrors the national mood: a country edging cautiously towards optimism after years of compounding trauma. Yet, the atmosphere was unmistakable. Residents

and returning expats – like me – gathered to reconnect, lingered over meals, reminiscing about long nights on the rooftop a decade ago.

Lovingly restored under the artistic direction of architect Galal Mahmoud, the hotel is polished enough to claim its place in The Leading Hotels of the World collection. In

Beirut, where hotels often run below capacity outside peak season, food is essential to keeping the lights on year-round. It's fortunate, then, that the revival is anchored by the return of Alan Geaam, the Lebanese chef who helms his eponymous Michelin-starred restaurant in Paris.

Geaam's years in Paris have shaped two distinct restaurant concepts. Padam, street-facing and full of movement, lets Beirut's chaos rush past as French technique meets Mediterranean flair. Qasti, an indoor-outdoor space, brings that same Michelin pedigree back home, confidently reworking Lebanese cuisine.

From the lobby, a dramatic central atrium rises through the building, drawing guests up towards the rooms. On the first floor, an art gallery occupies the space, part of the hotel's commitment to the Lebanese and regional art scene. More than 600 works are displayed throughout.

Like much in Beirut today, it is tempting to see Le Gray as a symbol – perhaps even a promise. Maybe that's over-reading a handsome hotel with good food, thoughtful art and beautifully restored rooms – but cities are rebuilt in increments. From shawarma stands to luxury hotels, and returning Lebanese families to the Gulf visitors occupying the rooms upstairs, each small act of presence matters.

These glimmers of hope add up to something larger than a hotel. They add up to a city returning to life.

Le Gray has been restored under the artistic direction of architect Galal Mahmoud

atmosphere was unmistakable. Residents and returning expats – like me – gathered to reconnect, lingered over meals, reminiscing about long nights on the rooftop a decade ago.

Lovingly restored under the artistic direction of architect Galal Mahmoud, the hotel is polished enough to claim its place in The Leading Hotels of the World collection. In

Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi ON ART

La Mise Au Tombeau (1926) by Mahmoud Said

A century ago, acclaimed Egyptian artist Mahmoud Said painted *La Mise Au Tombeau* (The Entombment), one of his earliest religious works. Set in Cairo's Necropolis – Al-Qarafa, which dates back to the Mamluk period – the painting depicts a burial scene in which religious figures and family members gather around the deceased. Their vivid garments puncture the beige monotony of the landscape, bringing ritual and emotion into sharp relief.

Hills dotted with mausoleums, a mosque, tombstones and streams of visitors populate the background. Even the sky participates in the scene: black crows – omens of death and the afterlife – hover above. To the right, slightly removed from the grief-stricken figures and Quranic recitation, stands a solitary woman with a child on her shoulder, likely a deliberate metaphor for continuity and the circle of life.

Across Egypt and parts of the Muslim world, families construct mausoleums to bury several generations within a single structure. These spaces speak to familial closeness, continuity and memory. They become sacred sites – and if the deceased held public significance, they often become places of shared cultural remembrance.

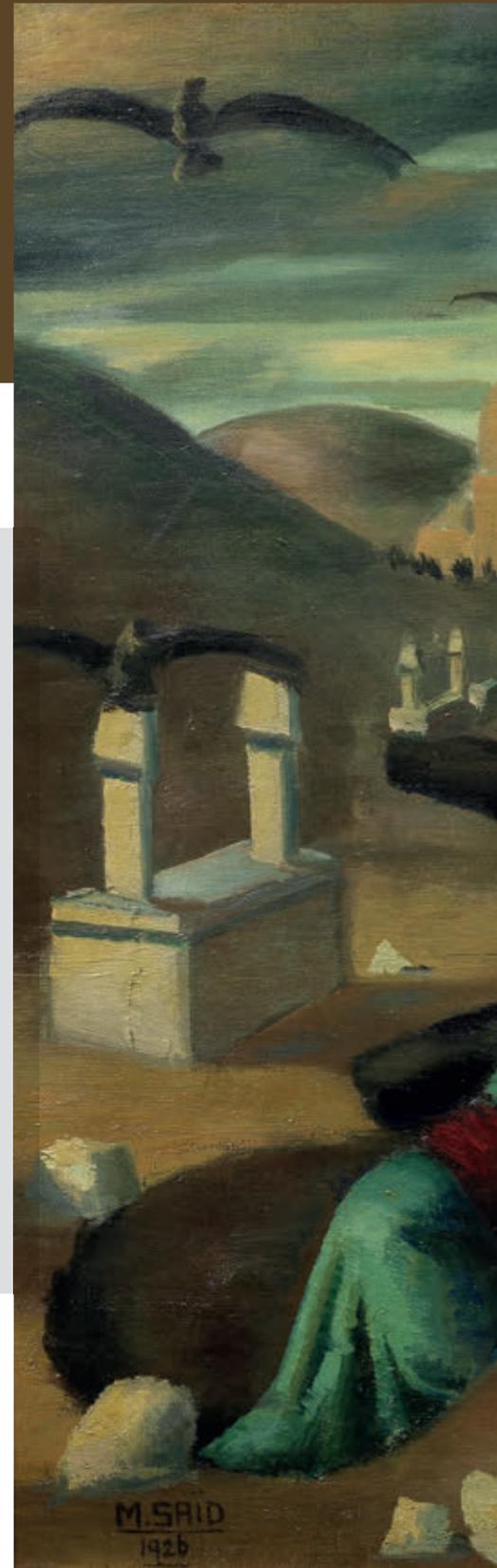
Many of us seek out such burial sites when travelling. I remember visiting the grave of Hafez Shirazi in Iran, and later Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where Jim Morrison, Gertrude Stein and many others are buried. What struck me was the care: clearly marked graves, maintained greenery and visitors asked to show respect for the deceased.

Returning to the UAE in the late 1990s, I was confronted with the deaths of a number of close friends. This meant I had to make frequent visits to local cemeteries – first to bury them and later to visit. Over time, I realised I could no longer locate their graves. With no headstones or clear markers, their resting places dissolved into anonymity, making return visits – and the continuation of connection – almost impossible.

Last year, I visited my father's grave for the first time in many years. Having lived abroad for a long period, I had lost its location entirely. The graves were barely demarcated – some marked only by small pieces of metal. We eventually identified the site, and installed a tombstone nearly 20 years later, thanks solely to a driver who had worked with my sister's household for three decades and had memorised the location through weekly Friday visits. Walking through the cemetery, I also noticed new tombstones bearing family names I had not yet encountered – allowing me, for the first time, to acknowledge their passing with a quiet prayer.

Against this backdrop, a UAE architecture firm, Pragma, has proposed rethinking our relationship with cemeteries in the country. The team's vision reframes these spaces not as sites of abandonment and forgetfulness, but as places where the deceased continue to be honoured – and where visitors are reminded of lives lived, contributions made and lessons left behind. Practically, this could mean clearer demarcation, pathways, basic landscaping, pavements and parking – modest interventions with profound impact.

Perhaps it is time to reconsider the role of cemeteries in our collective imagination in the UAE and the Gulf. They are not merely places of death, but of remembrance, tradition and continuity. Such spaces can strengthen bonds – within families and with this country – because family ties do not end with death. For many households, visiting the graves of loved ones every Friday remains a deeply rooted ritual. As a phrase I once heard puts it: just because someone has died, it does not mean you stop loving them.





“

**Cemeteries are not merely places
of death, but of remembrance,
tradition and continuity**

As in the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, visitors are welcomed by 'duelling dinos' in the Abu Dhabi museum's central hall

BEYOND DINO

The Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi is woven into a network

When Peter Kjaergaard, director of the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, speaks about the institution, he often returns to the idea that science begins not with explanation, but with feeling.

"We want natural history museums to create moments where you pause," he says. "You have an emotional experience."

That idea shaped a conversation with Kjaergaard and Lori Bettison-Varga, president and director of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The spaces of the Abu Dhabi museum's galleries became reference points in a wider discussion about the role such spaces can play as public institutions, not only in preserving knowledge, but also in shaping how people relate to the natural world.

It is an approach that underpins the Abu Dhabi museum's identity as it establishes itself in Saadiyat Cultural District. While its storytelling stretches across 13.8 billion years, from the origins of the universe to the future of life on Earth, the institution resists abstraction. The aim, Kjaergaard suggests, is to invite curiosity.

That philosophy is shared by Bettison-Varga. Both leaders speak with the confidence of long experience, but also with a visible enthusiasm for what these museums can become when accessibility is treated as a foundation rather than an afterthought.

"For us, it's been so important that we are removing as many barriers as possible," Kjaergaard says. "So that you don't think you need to be clever to get in. This is a place to engage."

That intention is reflected in the museum's design, which encourages movement, curiosity and conversation, rather than passive observation. It also aligns with the wider ambitions of Saadiyat Cultural District, where institutions are conceived as civic spaces intended for repeated visits.

Bettison-Varga frames the role of such museums in similarly public terms. "It's not just about the past and the dinosaurs," she explains. It is also about "where we are today" and how people understand their place in the world.

For Kjaergaard, that understanding is inseparable from the UAE's environmental history. He frequently links global narratives to local experience, describing survival in the region as a tradition shaped by conservation and restraint.

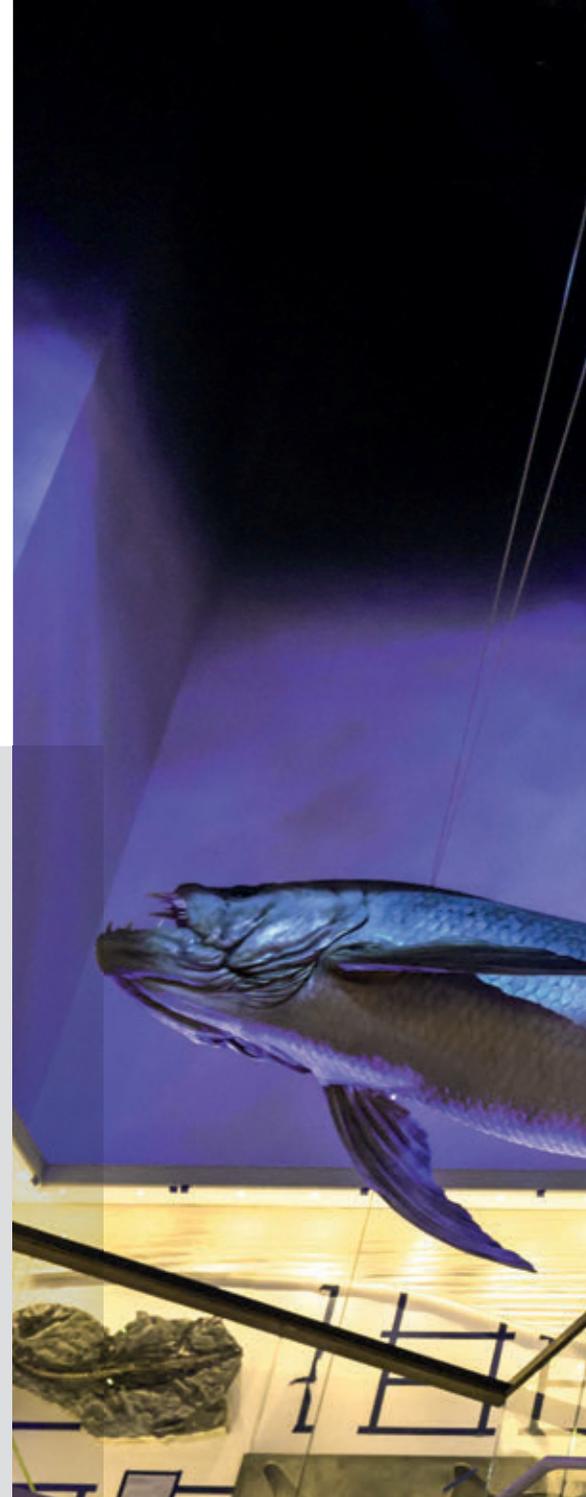
S A U R S

of international institutions and local influences, discovers Faisal Al Zaabi

EPA; NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM ABU DHABI; VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL



Clockwise from above, the museum is at Saadiyat Cultural District; the venue displays animals and objects found in the UAE's environmental history; and Peter Kjaergaard, director of the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, with Lori Bettison-Varga, president of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County



That philosophy is made explicit in the building itself. Etched on to one of the museum's walls is a quote by UAE Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, which Kjaergaard describes as foundational rather than symbolic. "On land and in the sea, our forefathers lived and survived in this environment," the quote reads. "They were able to do so because they recognised the need to conserve it, to take from it only what they needed to live, and to preserve it for succeeding generations."

Despite the vast timescales it covers, the museum repeatedly draws attention back to what is close by. Kjaergaard emphasises that much of the natural world explored inside the galleries exists just beyond the city.

"These big animals, these big whales, they are swimming around here," Kjaergaard says. "I don't think people realise these animals are just out there, next door."

That perspective shapes how the museum approaches mangroves and coastal ecosystems, environments many residents pass daily without engaging with directly. Rather than presenting them as scenery, the galleries position them as living systems shaped by human activity.

"Why do you have a broken whale here?" Kjaergaard asks, referring to a Bryde's whale that was stranded on Jubail Island and is displayed as it was found. "This is actually from the island just next door."

By anchoring global themes in local examples, the museum aims to foster connection and responsibility. "It's here with us," he says. "It's about celebrating our own place and creating pride in it."

Bettison-Varga, whose Los Angeles institution dates back more than a century, sees clarity in the Abu Dhabi museum's approach. "There's a benefit to opening a new museum because the possibilities are endless,"

she says. "You have the opportunity to set the frame for how you want to be part of the community."

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County oversees one of the world's largest scientific collections, with more than 35 million specimens. Visitors are famously welcomed by the "duelling dinos" in the museum's central hall. Abu Dhabi uses spectacle in a similar way, but both leaders stress that these moments are designed to open a conversation, not conclude it.

"We're more than just dinosaurs," Bettison-Varga says. For Kjaergaard, awe is the invitation. Participation is the goal.

That outward-looking philosophy is reflected in the City Nature Challenge, a global initiative that invites residents to document urban biodiversity using the iNaturalist app.

"You can take pictures of things that you see and upload them into the system," Bettison-Varga explains. Observations are then identified by community members and specialists, with the strongest entries becoming research-grade data.

The value lies in scale. A small number of museum scientists cannot capture the complexity of life across an entire city, but thousands of residents can. "Scientists alone cannot do those observations," she says, noting that public participation allows museums to understand what is happening in real time.

The City Nature Challenge began in 2016 as a friendly competition between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and now spans hundreds of cities worldwide. Abu Dhabi will take part this April, with the observation window opening in the final week of the month.



There's a benefit to opening a new museum because the possibilities are endless

For Kjaergaard, the initiative reflects the museum's desire to extend its reach beyond its galleries. "People are contributing to real data," he says. "If you're participating, you feel that you're part of it."

He also frames the project as a way of making environmental change visible. "The world is still changing," he says. "We need to monitor this. We need to keep an eye on what is actually happening."

Bettison-Varga offers a practical example from her own institution. With only one herpetologist on staff, public observations are essential for tracking changes in species distribution and the spread of invasive animals. "That crowdsourcing is important," she says, "because it helps reveal patterns we wouldn't otherwise see."

What emerges from the discussion is not only a shared philosophy, but also a sense of alignment about the future. Both leaders speak openly about collaboration between their institutions, seeing it as a way to strengthen public engagement and expand the role natural history museums play in their cities.

"It's one big family," Kjaergaard says, describing a global network that shares research, collections, exhibitions and approaches to community engagement. The relationship between Abu Dhabi and Los Angeles, he suggests, has the potential to elevate both institutions. Bettison-Varga agrees. Coming from an institution with more than a century of history, she sees value in the perspective a new museum brings.

Abu Dhabi's ability to design its spaces, programmes and partnerships from the ground up, she suggests, offers lessons for older institutions adapting to change.

At the centre of that exchange is a belief in awe as a catalyst for care. Bettison-Varga describes it as critical to drawing people into the story, while Kjaergaard sees it as the first step towards responsibility.

If visitors leave the museum noticing more than they did before – insects, birds, plants and subtle shifts in the landscape – then the institution has succeeded. Nature, Kjaergaard suggests, is present, persistent and waiting for attention.

Reinventing MAHFOUZ

From flashy covers to graphic novels, Naguib Mahfouz's works are reaching a new generation of readers courtesy of Cairo's Diwan Publishing, writes **Saeed Saeed**



When Diwan Publishing unveiled new editions of 12 of Naguib Mahfouz's novels, the first tranche of a deal with the late Nobel laureate's estate in 2022, the reaction from the Egyptian literary establishment was visceral.

Prominent critics reportedly questioned the covers, which eschewed the traditional and folkloric imagery associated with previous editions for something more surrealistic and contemporary.

Eyebrows were further raised over the following years, when the Cairo publisher released the rest of Mahfouz's 35 novels with updated visuals, as well as in the form of graphic novels and coffee-table books.

Speaking to *The National* from this month's Cairo International Book Fair, where Mahfouz was celebrated as the event's Cultural Personality, Diwan Publishing co-founder Ahmed Qarmalawi says the initial reaction was anticipated rather than surprising.

"The thing is, people thought we were doing these things just to please ourselves or simply to make noise, when in reality, it was all part of a plan executed with the family of the late, great Mahfouz," he explains.

"The plan from day one was to bring Mahfouz's work to a new generation, who perhaps only know him from his photographs or the way he is talked about, and not from reading the works. His stories are timeless, as borne out by the fact that he was the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, so we wanted to honour him by presenting his work in a way that is not encumbered by the old visual language we are used to," Qarmalawi adds.

Established in 2002 and known as one of Egypt's most prominent independent bookstore chains, Diwan Publishing never pitched for the rights to Mahfouz's catalogue when it was up for grabs after a 17-year run with Dar El Shorouk.

Qarmalawi recalls the team being approached by an intermediary of Hoda Naguib Mahfouz, the author's daughter, who currently manages his



AFP-VICTOR BESA / THE NATIONAL

Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz, opposite page, was honoured at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair 2024, with his daughter, Hoda, above, in attendance



estate. “To be honest, just having that meeting was kind of surreal,” the publisher says.

“But when we proposed that we wanted to really bring his work to a new generation, which also meant presenting it with covers by young Egyptian artists and across different mediums, we realised that this was what she had been looking for all along.”

Beginning with a dozen books, including the seminal *Cairo Trilogy* – *Palace Walk* (1956), *Palace of Desire* (1957) and *Sugar Street* (1957) – the steady release continued, with the latest including an English edition of the previously published graphic novel *The Thief and the Dogs*, adapted from Mahfouz’s novel of the same name, as well as an Arabic-language biography titled *Naguib Mahfouz: The Original and the Image*, which is available in various formats, including a coffee-table edition featuring archival photographs.

The more intensive work, Qarmalawi recalls, was not in the visual presentation alone. Diwan began each project by establishing an in-house

committee of literary experts and editors to examine several versions of each Mahfouz novel.

“Some of the levels of inconsistency were glaring, and that was apparent in different forms over decades,” he says. “Mahfouz was open at times about how some of his books were edited. A lot of this was down to censorship. There were deletions and interventions that affected the text. There were also issues such as typos and editorial mistakes that reflected the varying standards of publishing at the time. I feel that with our editions, we came as close as possible to producing the most accurate representations of the novels.”

While the initial reaction in Egypt was slow to soften, Qarmalawi says audiences in the Gulf immediately took to the new vision. He recalls Diwan Publishing participating in the 2024 Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, where Mahfouz was the event’s Focus Personality, and where his books were snapped up by young readers.

“And that is also because the book fair’s parent organisation, the Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre, instinctively supported the idea of what we and Hoda Mahfouz wanted to do when it came to presenting the work,” he says.

“People who went to that fair will remember a dedicated Naguib Mahfouz interactive pavilion, which we also helped to set up. These things go a long way in moving Mahfouz and his work from being viewed as museum pieces to something current and vital.”

While the length of the contract has not been publicly disclosed, Qarmalawi says the publishing house will continue to find new ways to bring Mahfouz’s stories back to the fore.

“This is not just a professional way of doing things,” he says. “I am first and foremost a reader and a writer from Egypt. I feel this is a responsibility, to take part in keeping this great legacy alive.”



His stories are timeless, as borne out by the fact that he was the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature

MAKE IT LAST

In a world of viral sensations and disposable media, here is our team's selection of physical media that deserves to be enjoyed slowly and thoughtfully



TURBULENCE BY HAFSA LODI (THE DREAMWORK COLLECTIVE)

Author and *The National* alumna Hafsa Lodi, who lives in Dubai, has debuted her first novel, *Turbulence*, with a sharp examination of the quiet pressures shaping many women's lives. When pregnant Dunya is unexpectedly upgraded to business class and separated from her family, the rare solitude forces a reckoning with choices she never planned to make. A shocking discovery sends her into labour mid-air, confronting her with an impossible decision. The novel asks: how do you balance feminism, faith and family – and what happens when life hits a rough patch?

Nasri Atallah, *TN Magazine* editor



THE LIBRARY COLLECTION: RAMADAN COLLECTION (ASSOULINE)

Not quite physical media, but something made to elevate it: a beautifully designed coffee-table book stand. Assouline is launching The Library Collection: Ramadan Collection, a capsule of objects hand-painted by illustrator George Greaves, the artist behind several of the brand's most recognisable covers – including *Saudi Dates: A Portrait of the Sacred Fruit*, *Saudi Coffee: The Culture of Hospitality* and the aforementioned *Mystic Mist: The Rituals of Huqqa*.

Nasri Atallah, *TN Magazine* editor

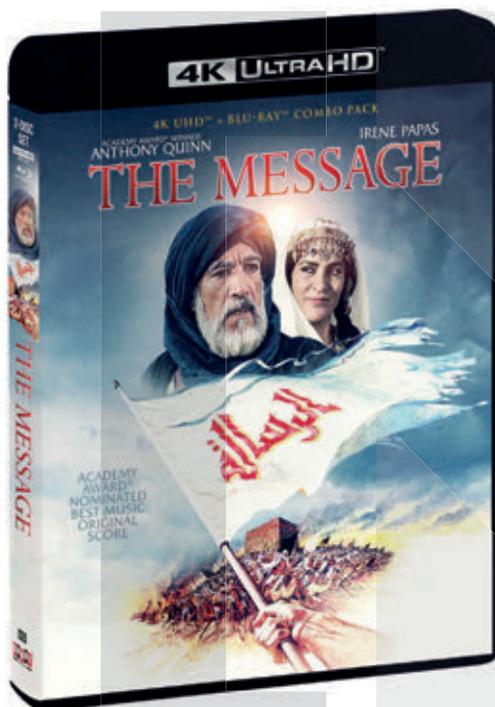




MYSTIC MIST: THE RITUALS OF HUQQA BY SARAH KHAN (ASSOULINE)

Just in time for Ramadan, luxury publisher Assouline has released *Mystic Mist: The Rituals of Huqqa*, a book dedicated to the culture, history and enduring appeal of shisha or huqqa. Tracing its journey across centuries and continents, the book explores how shisha evolved from a social practice into a ritual shaped by craftsmanship, ceremony and connection. Beginning with the introduction of tobacco by European explorers to the elite circles of the Mughal and Persian empires, who turned it into a ritual and deeply symbolic art form, the book uses historical paintings, vintage photographs and antiques to tell the story of shisha and looks at how it has transcended borders over the years. It also explores its cultural significance to a new generation both as a social practice and a symbol of shared experience.

David Tusing, assistant features editor



THE MESSAGE (SHOUT FACTORY)

Few historical epics approach their subject with the restraint and reverence of *The Message*. Released in 1976, Moustapha Akkad's film set out to depict the birth of Islam without ever showing the Prophet Mohammed, instead framing the story through those around him. It is a choice that gives the film its distinctive power, allowing belief, doubt and conviction to take centre stage rather than spectacle alone. That focus makes *The Message* a particularly fitting film to watch during Ramadan. Its emphasis on moral struggle, patience and faith sits comfortably with the reflective pace of the holy month, unfolding in a way that encourages contemplation rather than distraction. Anthony Quinn's performance as Hamza grounds the film emotionally, while Maurice Jarre's score lends it a solemn, almost meditative quality. Restored in 4K UHD, *The Message* arrives in a presentation that finally does justice to its scale and intention. It is not only a landmark of Islamic cinema, but also a thoughtful, dignified film that rewards revisiting, especially during a month defined by reflection and spiritual clarity.

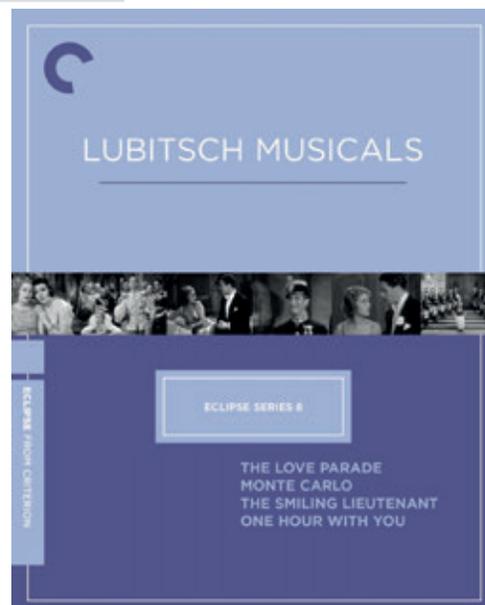
Faisal Al Zaabi, gaming journalist



ECLIPSE SERIES 8: LUBITSCH MUSICALS (CRITERION COLLECTION)

If you don't watch a lot of old Hollywood films, you're missing out – a lot of it has aged far better than you may expect. For no director is that more true than the German-American Ernst Lubitsch, whose films particularly in the early sound era of the 1930s often feel startlingly contemporary. And there was a good reason for that – the notorious Hays Code that strictly censored American moviemaking for decades hadn't yet been implemented, so his storytelling eschews the winks and nods we're used to from the black-and-white era and shows life as it actually was. *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931), *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and *Design for Living* (1933) are all still howlingly funny. Lubitsch can also be credited with helping invent the film musical – with the best of those groundbreaking works (including *Lieutenant*) featuring his trademark "Lubitsch touch" on display in Criterion's new Blu-ray box set – each as beautiful and bawdy as you'd hope.

William Mullally, arts & culture editor



THE WATCHLIST

From familiar action franchises to romcoms, February offers a varied slate of releases, writes **David Tusing**

1 FINDING HARMONY: A KING'S VISION (PRIME VIDEO)

Prime Video has partnered with King Charles III's foundation for a documentary that looks at the charity's work building sustainable communities around the world since its inception in 1990. Featuring appearances by the monarch himself, who will reflect on the foundation's mission from across the decades, as well as interviews with experts and scientists, the documentary is narrated by Oscar-winning English actress Kate Winslet, who was named the ambassador of the King's Foundation last year. "For much of my life, I have sought to promote and encourage ways we can work with, rather than against, nature. This film will, I hope, demonstrate just some of the remarkable work being done around the world to put harmony into practice, from the forests of Guyana to sustainable communities in India and, closer to home, through the work of my King's Foundation," King Charles said.

■ February 6

2 O'ROMEO (CINEMAS)

Timed for Valentine's Day, this "revenge romance" drama by acclaimed Indian filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj and starring Bollywood actor Shahid Kapoor – is inspired by true events. While little is known of the plot, the story

"explores passion, pain and the irreversible consequences of love denied", according to producers. Tripti Dimri stars opposite Kapoor, as part of an ensemble cast that also includes Nana Patekar, Avinash Tiwary, Disha Patani, Farida Jalal, Aruna Irani, Vikrant Massey and Tamannaah Bhatia in a special appearance.

■ February 13

3 ETERNITY (APPLE TV)

A romcom for Valentine's Day, this stars Elizabeth Olsen as Joan, who finds her husband of 65 years, Larry (Miles Teller), waiting for her in the afterlife. But there's a twist in the tale – also waiting for Joan is her first husband Luke (Callum Turner), who died in the Korean War when they were newly-weds. Faced with an impossible choice, Joan is tasked to relive some of her best memories with each man so she can choose who she wants to spend an eternity with. The film explores themes of love, memory, destiny and what ultimately brings us the greatest happiness.

■ February 13

4 THE CULT BEHIND THE KILLER: THE ANDREA YATES STORY (OSN+)

In March 2002, Andrea Yates, a mum from a Houston suburb in Texas, was found guilty of drowning her five

children – between the ages of six months and seven years – in the family bathtub a year earlier. This chilling three-part documentary looks beyond the crime itself, examining the wider forces that shaped the tragedy and the role played by extreme religious beliefs. It also explores Yates's struggles with severe postpartum depression and schizophrenia, raising questions about faith, mental illness and systemic failure.

■ February 19

5 THE NIGHT AGENT SEASON THREE (NETFLIX)

One of Netflix's most-watched shows returns with another action-packed season, centred on Peter Sutherland (Gabriel Basso), an FBI agent working at the White House as a Night Action telephone operator handling high-stakes, off-the-books national security threats. While details of the plot and Sutherland's next assignment are still under wraps, the teaser for season three shows him entering a packed football stadium and spotting his target, played by Suraj Sharma, who starred in the 2012 Oscar-winning film *Life of Pi*. Known for its binge-worthy plot and satisfying action sequences, the new season of *The Night Agent* promises another non-stop series where danger is everywhere and trust is in short supply.

■ February 19



1

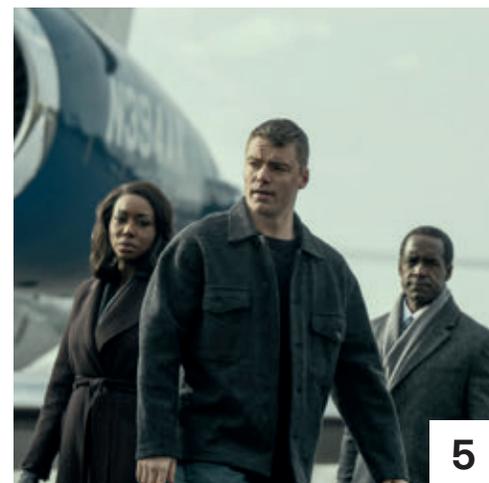
2



3



4



5



1



2

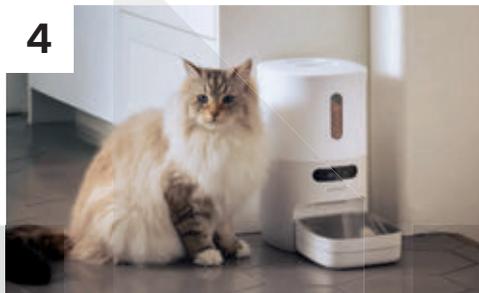
PET PLANS

From 360-degree cameras to automated feeding and air purifiers, Evelyn Lau rounds up the essentials for owners of furry friends

3



4



5



1 LEVOIT VITAL 100S-P SMART AIR PURIFIER

Air quality can be a particular concern in homes with pets, where fur, dander and odour can build up quickly. The Levoit Vital Smart Air Purifier uses a three-stage filtration system designed to capture fine airborne particles, including pet dander, dust and pollen, as well as odours and airborne chemicals. An infrared dust sensor monitors air quality in real time, with updates shown on the display and in the VeSync app. The auto mode adjusts fan speed based on detected pollutant levels, while an additional U-shaped air inlet is designed to reduce clogging from airborne pet hair. The purifier operates at noise levels as low as 23 decibels and supports app-based controls, scheduling and voice commands via Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant.

■ Dh599

2 PETLIBRO DOCKSTREAM CORDLESS WATER FOUNTAIN

Hydration is a key indicator of an animal's overall health, yet it can be difficult to monitor, particularly for pets who drink sporadically. The Petlibro Dockstream 2 Smart Cordless Fountain is designed to encourage more consistent water intake through a circulating, pump-free system that keeps water fresh without the need for cords. Running on a rechargeable battery with up to 30

days of power, the fountain can be placed anywhere in the home. Through the Petlibro app, owners can track drinking frequency, timing and trends, while receiving instant reminders for refills, filter changes and even cleaning. A four-layer vertical filtration system removes any fur, debris and odours, while dishwasher-safe stainless steel components help prevent face acne in pets and simplify maintenance for owners.

■ Dh330

3 FURBO 360 PET CAMERA

For pet owners who want a clearer picture of what happens once they leave the house, the Furbo 360 is an indoor pet camera that offers a full 360-degree rotating view and two-way audio. It is available in versions designed specifically for cats and dogs. The dog camera allows owners to toss treats remotely, while the cat model features a built-in feather toy intended to keep felines occupied. An integrated AI system can detect behaviours such as meowing, barking or vomiting, allowing owners to monitor their pets' well-being through the Furbo app. These features can be accessed via a "Furbo nanny" subscription, which unlocks alerts, activity tracking and real-time notifications when unusual behaviour is detected.

■ From Dh798

4 PAWSYNC SMART PET FEEDER

Aimed at owners looking to bring structure to feeding routines, the Pawsync Smart Pet Feeder helps automate and track daily meals. It features a scale that measures each portion to the gram, ensuring consistent serving sizes. The feeder also logs meals, allowing owners to monitor feeding patterns and adjust schedules through the app. Additional features include jam detection technology to reduce missed meals, several feeding modes and real-time notifications when a pet is fed.

■ Dh294

5 WHISKER LITTER-ROBOT 4

For many pet owners, scooping litter remains one of the more tedious parts of daily care. The Litter-Robot 4 Core Bundle combines a self-cleaning litter box with a range of accessories that help simplify maintenance. The set includes the Litter-Robot 4 unit, a litter-trapping mat, a step, OdorTrap odour eliminators, cleansing wipes and liners. The litter box connects to the Whisker app, which tracks usage and provides basic health insights based on activity and weight data. Suitable for households with up to four cats weighing at least 1.4kg, the system uses built-in weight sensors and requires placement on a firm, level surface for accurate readings.

■ Dh2,570



LORO PIANA

In 1987, collectors, enthusiasts and friends of Loro Piana formed an informal driving club known as Rosso Corsa, later renamed the Loro Piana Classic Car Team. Its members still take part in famed events such as the Mille Miglia and the Coppa d'Oro delle Dolomiti, the latter guiding pre-1971 cars through the Alpine scenery of the Dolomites. With such deep ties to motoring, it was little surprise when Loro Piana lent its support to the International Concours of Elegance in St Moritz in 2024. To mark the third year of this partnership, the house has created a new version of its famed Roadster jacket. First launched in 2004 for the 75th anniversary of the Concorso d'Eleganza Villa d'Este, the Roadster was conceived as the ultimate driving jacket: weatherproof, comfortable and designed with twin rear vents for ease of movement. The latest cash herringbone coarsehair version with Storm System technology bridges luxury and motoring culture. Spun from cashmere into a chevron herringbone tweed, it uses a coarsehair technique to remove rough fibres for a smoother hand, while the patented Storm System discreetly layers technical materials to make the jacket wind-resistant and waterproof without compromising on the feel or quality.

BLACK BOOK

Our round-up of the most interesting and noteworthy arrivals in the world of fashion and motoring

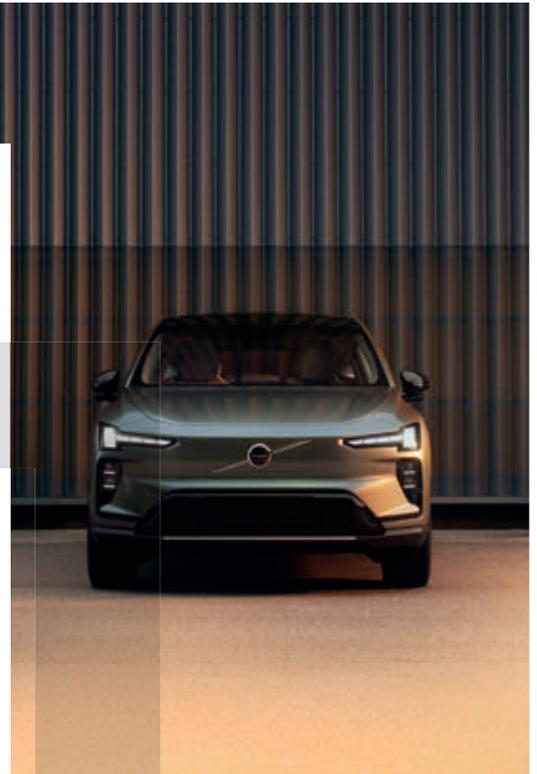


BVLGARI

Bvlgari Icons is a series of five precious minaudières built around a simple provocation: what can be carried in a bag too small to hold a phone? The answer is culture. Five women were invited to author miniature books designed to fit inside the evening bags. Contributors include Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, American model Linda Evangelista, South Korean actress Kim Ji-won, Italian-American actress Isabella Rossellini and South African architect Sumayya Vally – all of whom also feature in the campaign imagery.

VOLVO

The Venn diagram between fans of Scandinavian automotive design and haters of range anxiety has finally overlapped. With the EX60, Volvo makes its clearest case yet that going electric no longer requires compromise. Entering the most competitive EV segment, the all-electric mid-size SUV promises up to 810km of range in all-wheel-drive form and rapid charging that adds 340km in only 10 minutes. It is also Volvo's lowest-emissions electric car to date, matching even the smaller EX30. Inside is a 28-speaker Bowers & Wilkins system – complete with headrest speakers – that turns the cabin into a listening room, while Google's Gemini AI with natural voice interaction makes this the brand's most intelligent car yet.



VACHERON CONSTANTIN

The Overseas Tourbillon is the first Vacheron Constantin model to combine titanium with a deep red dial. With three interchangeable straps, this sporty watch can be worn with a metal bracelet or a white or red rubber strap. Powered by an automatic calibre 2160, in a 42.5 millimetre titanium case that is 10.39mm thick, this comes with a deep red, sunburst satin finished dial and 18K white gold hour markers. With a tourbillon at 6 o'clock, the timepiece has a power reserve of 80 hours, as well as a soft iron casing ring to ensure anti-magnetic protection.

PRADA

Prada is flexing its leather skills in its Ramadan collection. To complement clothing made in rich fabrics, such as the reversible taffeta jacket and long velvet dress, it has introduced a series of small leather accessories in Saffiano, its scratch and water-resistant leather. In colours of burgundy, pyrite, chrome and clay gold, these leather accessories sit perfectly alongside Prada's evening looks. The cross-hatched design gives the leather its durability, making it perfect for everyday use. Think badge holder in shimmering pale pyrite, the folded symmetry of an envelope clutch in emerald green and a burgundy leather card with a shoulder strap – perfect for long Ramadan nights.



ONE LAST THING

Meera Al Midfa

Meera Al Midfa is one of the most versatile Emirati actresses working today. Her recent roles alone span different emotional registers and periods of life – from a mother navigating holiday chaos in the uproarious Yas Island-set comedy *Al Eid Eiden*, to a daughter pushed to her limits in Nayla Al Khaja's latest horror film, *Baab*.

That range continues with Al Midfa's next project, Dubai TV Ramadan series *Dara 1961*, inspired by true events and described as the UAE's answer to *Titanic*.

We caught up with her for our One Last Thing questionnaire.

What is your favourite time of day and why?

Dawn to sunrise, that blue hour into golden hour. It's fresh, quiet.

What is your favourite restaurant anywhere in the world?

A sunlit Mediterranean place, elevated, by the water. Not mainstream, but where the food is honest and time disappears.

When was the first time you realised your parents were human?

When I realised they were doing their best with tools they were never taught to use.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Someone who creates meaningful work that invites people into deeper ways of meeting the world and each other.

Do you have any hidden talents?

Reading emotional subtext. Incredibly thoughtful gifting. Multitasking.

Your favourite book?

Anything reflective or educational.

What type of music can't you stand?

Anything aggressively loud or empty.

What puts you in a bad mood?

Being rushed. Inauthenticity. Or days where small setbacks snowball.

What can you not live without?

Good lighting, instruments of the senses, sparkling drinks and my family.

Dream dinner guests?

A filmmaker, a philosopher, a scientist, a musician, a poet, a shaman and a couple of people who know me deeply.

Sitting on the sofa or out with friends?

Is it cheating if I say sofa with friends?

What smell takes you straight back to childhood?

The smell of rain takes me back to road trips in Germany and playtime at the parks in London. The smell of leather takes me back to the safety of my dad's arms. Oud and rose together remind me of my great-grandmother.

What food takes you back to childhood?

Those terribly unhealthy sweets that everyone ate back then that you would find at the baqala. And pistachio ice cream!

Can you play a musical instrument?

Piano. Only chords and a few covers.

Have you ever been on a motorcycle?

As a kid, I loved riding four-wheelers – I can still remember the smell.

Any words to live by?

Strive to be relentlessly authentic and always remember to be kind. Sensitivity is strength, courage is meeting fear with grace. Approach the world with awe.

Biggest pet peeve?

Inauthenticity and it goes with attempts of manipulation or a lack of consideration.

The most niche thing you watch on YouTube?

The niche thing about it could be the combo all together. It ranges from film breakdowns and history docs to theological reflection, bite-size educational videos, wellness deep dives, conspiracies, scientific anomalies, hypothetical realities and esoteric metaphysics.

Which city do you love but would hate to live in?

So, this makes me realise I have not seen enough of the world.

What is your favourite Arabic word?

I can think of so many, but I'll focus on three.



Sabr, yaqeen, and qamar. This is because of the significance they have had in challenging moments in my life.

Do you believe in aliens?

I believe the universe is too vast for us to be the only story.

How do you take your tea?

Flavourful, intentional, ritualistic. Must come with soft lighting and something to listen to, read, or someone to talk to.

What makes you cry?

Unspoken tenderness. People trying their best. Quiet gestures. Grace, humility in the face of cruelty. Courage. Language that articulates what is felt but unspoken.

What do social algorithms think you're interested in?

Film and art, aesthetics, consciousness, stoicism, esoteric philosophy and unfortunately some silly memes.

TikTok or Instagram?

Instagram. It's community-based and I find all my products, hacks and treatments there thanks to my algorithm.

What about you would surprise people?

How disciplined and tough I am beneath the softness. Also that I never feel fully accomplished, and I don't like to watch most of my performances.

What was the last thing you did for the first time?

This kind of interview. I used to read these as a kid, so it feels like a full circle moment.

As told to William Mullally



People will be surprised by how tough I am beneath the softness

MORE
CRAVINGS
by MARRIOTT BONVOY™

Exclusive Iftar Offers Await

Discover remarkable Iftar experiences and offers only on the More Cravings by Marriott Bonvoy™ dining app.

Discover More With

MARRIOTT BONVOY®